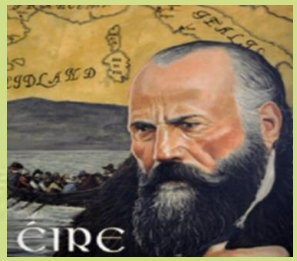
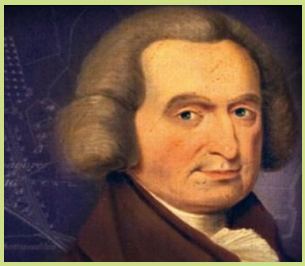
Keeping The Flame Alive:

The Story of Irish Resistance (1558-2022)

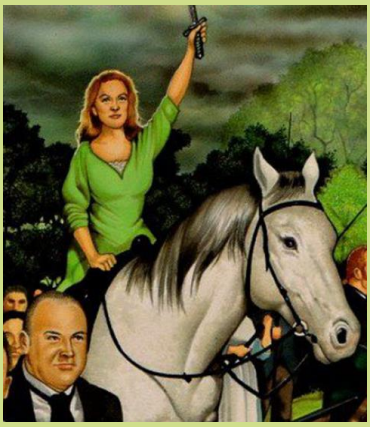
Dr Patricia Herron



Hugh O'Neill (1540-1616)

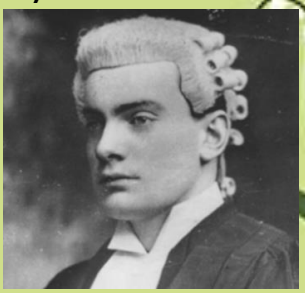


Charles O'Conor of Belanagare (1710-1791)

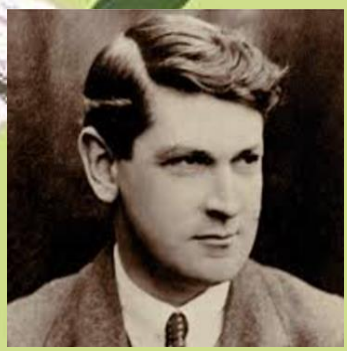


Betsy Grey (1778-1798)

Eugene O'Curry (1794-1862)



Pádraig Pearse (1879-1916)



Michael Collins (1890-1922)

Bobby Sands (1954-1981)

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From the beginning of the reign of the English Queen Elizabeth I, up to the end of the reign of her sister Queen Elizabeth II, a period spanning almost 500 years, the people of Ireland have been subjected to unremitting brutal attacks on their land, their culture, their religion and their very existence by their nearest neighbour, England.

This books tells the story of England's colonisation of Ireland through the eyes and lives of the Irish people affected by it. As well as recounting England's campaigns of land-grabbing, warfare, plantations, ethnic cleansing, enforced starvation, evictions, imprisonment, executions and much more, this book tells the story of how Irish people, women and men, bravely resisted and fought back, in any way they could, against England's superior power and overwhelming avarice and aggression.

The author has selected the lives of seven Irish people, all of them heroes, to exemplify, in some detail, the bravery, vision and determination of Ireland's men and women throughout the centuries concerned. Because of them, and many, many others like them, the Flame of Gaelic Ireland was protected and preserved, allowing it to shine brightly today for us.

However, the author also argues that the story is ongoing, albeit in its final stages. For, as long as the north of Ireland remains under British control, Ireland remains a divided country. The people of Ireland voted for peace, equality and reconciliation in Northern Ireland under the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, but they also voted for the right to unite their country, by way of future democratic majority vote in referendums to be held in both parts of Ireland. Unless and until that contract to hold such referendums is honoured by British governments, and campaigned and prepared for by Irish politicians and governments, the progress and peace provided by the Good Friday Agreement is at risk, and Ireland remains unfree.

Our generation must now play its part by making sure our politicians honour their commitments and, in doing so, keep the Gaelic Flame alive for future generations.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of the seven Irish heroes
whose resistance to the English colonisation of their country is told
in the following pages.

This book is also dedicated to the millions of Irish people
who suffered as a result of that colonisation:
whether by death, famine, displacement, imprisonment,
impoverishment or other tragic loss.

Finally, this book is dedicated to the citizens of our future
free, peaceful, united, Irish Republic.

Introduction

THIS BOOK EXPLORES the tumultuous relationship between Ireland and England/Britain, spanning many hundreds of years. Although England first invaded Ireland in the 12th century, this work focuses on the period between the reigns of Elizabeth I (1558-1603) and her sister Queen, Elizabeth II (1952-2022). Each woman ruled for several decades, under quite dissimilar constitutional circumstances. Elizabeth I had ultimate power and control over her Court and the political affairs of her country, England. Elizabeth II had less obvious power and control over her Court, while her power and control over her Kingdom, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was limited to that of Head of State, subject to the power and control of parliament. However, she was also Head of State of an extensive Commonwealth of Nations which England had colonised in the intervening years.

This book deals with two main issues: firstly, England/Britain's unremitting belligerent conduct towards Ireland and the Irish people during the period concerned; and secondly, Irish responses to that conduct. It is to be hoped that by shining a light on both issues, many myths and lies about England/Britain's conduct, and reasons for that conduct, will be exposed for what they are. It is said that the victors write history: this is an attempt to rewrite English/British history in Ireland, from an Irish resistance perspective.

Unlike most histories, this one makes no claim to be impartial. It is written by a woman (now a grandmother and pensioner) who was born and educated in Scotland, who lived and worked for many years in England and who moved to live permanently in Ireland over forty years ago. Having been both a British subject (by birth), and an Irish citizen (by birthright and choice), I present my view of the complex historical, and modern, relationship between Britain and Ireland, and the conclusions I have come to about that relationship. Although this is a personal view, it is backed up by a wide range of existing and new historical research, biographies, personal accounts and literary sources. My

conclusions, however, have inevitably been influenced by my own beliefs and principles and by my own life circumstances. I may not be totally impartial, but I hope that I have written from, and have reached, a position of at least some detachment and truth.

My objectives in writing this book are threefold. One is to present evidence of England's (and/or Britain's) attempts to colonise Ireland, to conquer her people and to deliberately destroy her culture. I will give examples of how, century after century, right up to modern times, England has employed policies of discrimination, propaganda, oppression, violence, division and death against native Irish people to achieve that aim**.**

A second objective in writing this book, as the title suggests, is to show how succeeding generations of Irish people, far from meekly submitting to English/British aggression, fought back and resisted those aims, policies and personnel.

And thirdly, at a time when Ireland's ties with Britain appear to be loosening, and our connections with Europe strengthening (despite ours being a very small island nation on the western extremities of Europe), I will give examples of interactions between Ireland and other European countries that demonstrate strong, mutually close relationships in previous centuries.

It may be appropriate here to outline my background. My parents were Irish Catholics, forced from their home in Belfast after the Second World War because my father, who came from County Donegal, was no longer welcome in Northern Ireland because of his nationality and his religion. He had, however, been perfectly welcome to live and work there during the Second World War, when many Northern Irish Protestant men were fighting in British regiments abroad and labour was scarce. When those soldiers were demobbed and returned home, and housing was scarce, Irishmen such as my father were served with deportation orders. My mother, a native of Northern Ireland, was eight-and-a-half months pregnant when her husband was told he would have to leave – although she could stay. Graciously, he was allowed temporary reprieve when he explained their baby was due very soon. But, two weeks later, on the very day of my sister's birth, he was escorted to the Belfast docks by the Royal Ulster Constabulary and onto a ship bound for England. My mother was left alone to fend for their two-year-old daughter and their one-day-old baby. She had no choice but to return to her parents' small farm in Derrygellia, Roslea, on the Fermanagh-Monaghan border.

My father spent the next two years travelling around England, working where he could, and facing extreme anti-Irish hostility, at a time when notices for accommodation

vacancies freely advertised 'No Blacks, No Dogs, No Irish'. He finally settled in Glasgow, as countless Donegal people had done before him. He found work and rented a small tenement flat, consisting of a room and kitchen with an outside toilet. Finally, he was able to send for his wife and family to join him. That's where I was born three years later, the fourth of six girls.

I was a 'baby boomer', my health cared for by the new British National Health Service, and my education secured far beyond the dreams, means and expectations of my parents, to university level, thanks to the post-War Labour government's free education policies. I have much to be grateful to Scotland (and Britain) for. As I was growing up, I fully identified with my country of birth and residence. I absorbed the history of both and was proud, and grateful, to consider myself both Scottish and British.

But, in an emotional way, I also loved Ireland. My parents never abandoned their Irish identity, although they did not impose any political views on their six daughters. We did not learn much about Irish history from them, although I do remember my mother insisting we all sit down together to watch a television documentary on the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Rising in 1966. I also learned the names of Irish rebels, and the campaigns in which they fought against the English, from her considerable record collection of Irish rebel songs. My mother, having been born in 1916, and brought up right on the border between the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland, was a bit of a rebel herself, her father being an area organiser for the Ancient Order of Hibernians, which was active in Ulster counties, mainly as a defence organisation against the unionist Orange Order.

My five sisters and I were brought up in an Irish cultural setting in Glasgow, with weekly gatherings at houses of our relatives, where Irish fiddle music, Irish ballad singing, Irish poetry recitations, Irish dancing and card-playing were our entertainment. The practice of our religion was strictly observed. We attended single-sex Catholic secondary schools, run by nuns. More often than not we spent our summer holidays with relatives in Ireland. In short, ours was a typical immigrant Irish family living in Britain.

It is fair to say, then, that my relationship with Ireland and Britain, like their relationship with each other, is complex. Britain gave us a home, employment, a world-class health service and a first-class education. It encouraged us to assimilate and we did. But our formal education did not include a history of anything Irish. We were kept in ignorance of that heritage, and our parents mostly kept their heads down and their mouths shut when it came to the topics of Irish history and politics.

My knowledge of that history and politics came fairly late in life. Before the Troubles in the North started in the late-1960s, it was virtually non-existent. Gradually, I began to take more notice of television news broadcasts, but I was still accepting, without question, the British version of what was happening there, and the British reasons for what was happening. By the mid-1970s I was reading more widely and had become firmly opposed to British policy in Northern Ireland, including the presence of British troops there.

In 1976 I moved to England, where I joined the Troops Out movement and began my life as a political activist. Some years later, I moved to Ireland and mostly disengaged from active politics, being more pre-occupied with trying to earn a living to support my young family in a country that was deep in economic recession. Although I was a qualified mathematics teacher, I could not get teaching work in Ireland because I lacked a qualification in the Irish language. I retrained in Co-operative Development and found work in the North for a while, in the mid-1980s. There I saw, first-hand, some of the pressures and discrimination that native Catholics and nationalists were experiencing on a daily basis, and had been for years.

Then, shortly after I returned home to the south of the country, came the breakdown of my second marriage and a long-lasting, family law court battle that I could not afford to finance. When my family could no longer assist with providing funds to help with my legal fees, I started to research the law and represent myself. That eventually led to me taking up the study of law full-time and I succeeded in gaining several law degrees, up to and including PhD level. My doctoral thesis was based on the Brehon Laws of Ireland. Throughout my years of study, and afterwards, I worked as an independent, voluntary paralegal, helping to obtain justice for people who had fallen victim to the inadequacies and injustices of the Irish legal system. I specialised in seemingly hopeless cases, in all areas of law. Although more than suitably educationally qualified, I declined to train for professional qualification as a solicitor or barrister. I preferred to remain independent of a legal profession and system of which I now had first-hand experience, and which I considered, with very good reason, to be seriously corrupt.

This brief outline of some of the important events in my life gives some idea of how, where and when my views on history and politics were formed. Today I do not see the world in terms of black and white absolutes. I do not identify exclusively with any single political party or group. I try to keep an open mind and judge ideas, people and events on their merits. But, on the other hand, at this stage of my life, my views have fairly firmly

coalesced. I accept that I have been influenced by my place and time of birth, my education, my experiences, my beliefs and my relationships, unconsciously or otherwise. I self-identify as an Irish citizen, an Irish republican and a United Irelander. I am, therefore, not impartial.

Accordingly, neither is this book impartial. It has been influenced by all of the above, and more. Nor is it a bland chronology of historical Kings, Queens and battles – although they do feature in it. It is more a history of what I consider to be some of the most important events that have contributed to the turbulent relationship between Ireland and Britain, mainly during the period from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I to the end of the reign of Elizabeth II.

During those 464 years, great changes took place in Ireland, precipitated, in the main, by England/Britain.[1] Most, if not all of them, disadvantaged the native Irish people, causing them to fight back against their oppressors in whatever way they could. That resistance gives rise to the title, and is the main focus, of this book.

Despite Ireland's long history of outstanding scholarship, artistic mastery and spiritual wisdom and practice, the Scottish and English Adventurers who came to Ireland before, during and after Elizabeth I's reign, did not do so to learn from Ireland's great store of knowledge and wisdom, as scholars and pilgrims in previous centuries had done, but rather to exploit Ireland's resources and people. They usurped land and property for personal gain, killed many thousands, indeed millions, of Irish people, combatants and civilians alike, and did their utmost to destroy Ireland's ancient culture. They did all this under the pretext of 'bringing civilisation to the Irish'.

Ireland thus became England's first colony. The practices carried out in Ireland were replicated by England over succeeding centuries in many other countries around the world, and were inflicted on many other indigenous people, and many other ancient cultures, all in the name of 'civilisation'.

The various responses to England's/Britain's aggression in Ireland are chronicled in this book from the viewpoint, not of the oppressor, but of the oppressed. I am sure that many people living in Ireland, especially young people, and the Irish diaspora throughout the world, may be totally unaware of the enormity and extent, of England's colonial

[1] I tend to use the name 'Britain' to mean Great Britain and/or England. In this context 'England' would be the more correct terminology for the early part of this period under consideration. More on the constitutional positions and names will be examined later in this book.

aggression. I strongly feel that such knowledge is part of their culture and their history, and that they have a right, and a duty, to know about it.

A few years ago I visited Auschwitz concentration camp to gain some understanding of the Nazi regime in Poland, and throughout Europe, before and during the Second World War. It was a sobering and disturbing experience. I learned from our tour guide that in Poland, every single schoolchild has to visit such places of barbarity and death, as a way of ensuring that the memory of that period of atrocity is kept alive, and in the hope, that by so doing, such things will never happen again. To my knowledge, no such compulsory lessons are taught to Irish children at scenes of previous English/British barbarity in their country. Perhaps they should be.

It would be easy for me to resort to anger and resentment on discovering, or rediscovering, Britain's aggression towards the Irish people, but that is not my intention. Nor is it my intention to arouse anger or resentment in others. I believe it is important for mental and spiritual wellbeing, and personal development, to move beyond those base emotions and to learn to forgive. But it is not wise to forget. As Winston Churchill said during a speech in the House of Commons in 1948, *"Those who fail to learn from history are condemned to repeat it"*. The original saying, which Churchill amended, was made by American writer and philosopher George Santayana in 1905: *"Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it*". Unfortunately, the British seem to choose to remember only those historical incidents in which they consider themselves to have been the victors, such as the two World Wars of the twentieth century. When forced to remember atrocities from the past for which they were responsible, they have learned only how to evade learning any lessons.

For example, it became clear during the Brexit debates of the past few years, that one of the main forces underlying the British people's drive to leave the European Union was a desire to return to the 'glory days of Empire'. The people supporting that goal envisaged Britain as once again becoming a great and powerful global leader. We Irish looked on bemused, as well as aghast. Firstly, at their apparent ignorance of all the factors (geographical, financial, state of world development, military resources and a whole host of others) that made their first attempt at world supremacy so successful in their eyes. They seemed incapable of realising that all world powers and empires eventually fall, e.g. the Roman Empire and the Third Reich – two attempts at world domination about which they should have been fairly knowledgeable, considering they were conquered and

subjected by the first and, within living memory, managed at great cost to fend off the imminent likelihood of being conquered and subjected by the second.

Another reason the Irish were appalled at this British characteristic of longing for their 'glorious past' was their apparent ignorance of, and indifference to, the harrowing effect their policies and actions have had on other people. Several legacies of Britain's 'glory days of Empire' have resurfaced to arouse attention and debate in recent years. One was the anniversary of the 1919 Jallianwalla Bagh (or Amritsar) massacre in India. India, at the time, was a colony of Britain, 'a jewel in the crown' of the British Empire. Acting Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer of the British Army, ordered the troops under his command to fire on unarmed civilians who were peacefully demonstrating, resulting in the killing of around four hundred of them (or closer to one thousand according to Indian sources). In 2019, the hundredth anniversary of the massacre, labelled by The Guardian newspaper as *"one of the worst atrocities of Britain's colonial rule"*, the British High Commissioner to India laid a wreath to commemorate the victims. Reflecting on the event, the High Commissioner said, *"You might want to rewrite history, but you can't. What you can do . . . is to learn the lessons of history. We will never forget what happened here"*.

What a piece of carefully constructed, disingenuous double-speak. As a lawyer, I could hardly fail to recognise this dark art form. It appears, in the first instance, to say something empathetic and regretful, but, in fact, the opposite is the case. As if the British were not experts at rewriting history. Unfortunately for them, on this occasion, they were unable to do so and were shamed into a response, albeit one hundred years later. However, as the official representative of the British government, the High Commissioner failed to acknowledge any responsibility for what happened in Amritsar. So what lessons, if any, did the British actually learn from this episode in their history? Apparently none, as their re-found longing for the 'glory days of Empire' demonstrates.

The High Commissioner did go on to express *"regret for what happened and the suffering caused"*. But this was just another disguised failure to accept responsibility and culpability, never mind make some form of reparation. The very least that Britain could, and should, have said if they genuinely felt regret for the suffering they had caused, was, *"We did wrong; we are responsible for the killing of hundreds of innocent people; for that we are deeply sorry, we ask for forgiveness, and we would like to make amends in some way"*, or words to that effect. Expressing 'regret' is not an apology if it falls short of taking responsibility and offering to make amends. Apparently, the British way of learning the lessons of the past is: never

admit blame; never apologise, never ask for forgiveness and never seek to make amends. And accordingly, as the saying goes, they are condemned to repeat their past history until they learn from their mistakes.

The example of Amritsar can be matched many times over in Ireland. There have been so many examples of British/English brutality, oppression and killing of innocent Irish people over the centuries that it would take a very large book to tell all the stories. One fairly recent example was what happened in Derry in January 1972, an event now remembered as Bloody Sunday.

In 2010, the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, appeared to break ranks with British protocol concerning the lessons of history (*viz* no blame, no apology, no asking for forgiveness, no seeking to make amends), when he stunned the world by accepting, on his government's and his nation's behalf, responsibility and blame for the killing of fourteen unarmed civil rights demonstrators, and the maiming of a similar number, by British troops. After the Saville Report of the second Public Enquiry[2] into the events of that day was published, Cameron addressed the House of Commons, saying,

"Mr Speaker, I am deeply patriotic. I never want to believe anything bad about our country. I never want to call into question the behaviour of our soldiers and army, who I believe to be the finest in the world. And I have seen for myself the very difficult and dangerous circumstances in which we ask our soldiers to serve. But the conclusions of this report are absolutely clear. There is no doubt, there is nothing unequivocal, there are no ambiguities. What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong."

He went on to list some of Lord Saville's findings of fact: e.g. the first shots were fired by the British soldiers; none of those killed had been armed; no warnings had been given by the army; there was a loss of self-control by soldiers; none of them had been threatened or attacked prior to opening fire; soldiers gave false evidence at the Tribunal hearing in an attempt to justify their behaviour; many of the victims were crawling away when shot at and the unjustifiable firing by soldiers was the cause of the deaths and injuries of the victims.

Cameron continued,

[2] The first Enquiry, held by Lord Scarman, had reached a totally different conclusion. His finding was that no blame could be attached to the British government or soldiers. But that report was widely criticised and rejected by those present in Derry on the day in question and was declared a whitewash by the families of the victims, who ceaselessly campaigned for a new Enquiry.

"I know that some people wonder whether, nearly 40 years on from an event, a Prime Minister needs to issue an apology. For someone of my generation, Bloody Sunday and the early 1970s are something we feel we have learned about rather than lived through. But what happened should never, ever have happened. The families of those who died should not have had to live with the pain and the hurt of that day and with a lifetime of loss. Some members of our armed forces acted wrongly. The government is ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces and for that, on behalf of the government, indeed, on behalf of our country, I am deeply sorry".

Although he went on to praise the actions of the British Army in Northern Ireland in general, those words heard by the nationalist people of Derry, on a huge screen in Guildhall Square, were enough. There was jubilation and tears because, finally, a British Prime Minister had accepted responsibility, had admitted culpability and had expressed a sincere apology for the suffering and death committed by British soldiers against innocent Irish people.[3]

However, in the year following David Cameron's speech to the House of Commons, in May 2011, another important and symbolic event took place in the history of the relationship between Britain and Ireland. The United Kingdom's Head of State, Queen Elizabeth II, at the invitation of then President of Ireland, Mary McAleese, arrived in Ireland on a State visit, for the first time in her reign. It was hoped the visit would further normalise relations between Ireland and Britain, considered desirable and feasible in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. The visit had gone well. The Queen and her husband, Prince Philip, had shown great interest in the country, its historical artefacts and the world-famous hospitality of the Irish people. At a State banquet in Dublin Castle, Queen Elizabeth made a speech, during the course of which she referred to the relationship between Britain and Ireland over past centuries. This could have been an opportunity for her to atone for Britain's conduct towards Ireland, and the Irish people, during those long years, and to show how far the monarchy had come in accepting responsibility for the infliction of past suffering, as well as providing a much-needed opportunity to heal wounds (as her Prime Minister had done the previous year in relation to Bloody Sunday).

But the Queen chose not to accept responsibility, chose not to admit blame and chose not to give an apology. Instead, we were subjected to another master class in double-speak,

[3] Compensation awards have duly been made following Court actions in respect of relatives of those killed and for those wounded.

where both sides in the conflict were deemed, as she implied, equally culpable. Referring to the complex relationship between the two nations, Queen Elizabeth said,

"Of course, the relationship has not always been straightforward, nor has the record over the centuries been entirely benign. It is a sad and regrettable reality that through history our islands have experienced more than their fair share of heartache, turbulence and loss. These events have touched us all, many of them personally, and are a painful legacy. We can never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. To all those who have suffered as a consequence of our troubled past I extend my sincere thoughts and deep sympathy. With the benefit of historical hindsight, we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently, or not at all".

Talk about being underwhelming. She was not going to go down the same road as her Prime Minister Cameron. She was not going to take responsibility; she was not going to admit culpability; and she was not going to offer a sincere apology for the suffering and death committed by British soldiers and British politicians, in her name, against innocent Irish people. She must have known that to offer 'sincere thoughts' and 'deep sympathy' for all that the British were responsible for, over many centuries, was deeply insulting to Irish people and to the Irish nation.

She also said, *"Madam President, speaking here in Dublin Castle it is impossible to ignore the weight of history, as it was when you and I laid wreaths at the Garden of Remembrance. Indeed, so much of this visit reminds us of the complexity of our history, its many layers and traditions, but also the importance of forbearance and conciliation. Of being able to bow to the past, but not be bound by it".*

If it really was impossible for her to ignore 'the weight of history', she should, at the very least, have realised that the scales laden down by that weight, that suffering and death, tipped far heavier against the Irish people than against her, her predecessors or their subjects.

Unfortunately, as her High Commissioner to India had done at the Amritsar commemoration, the Queen, as Head of State, declined to accept responsibility, declined to apologise or accept blame, declined to ask for forgiveness and declined to offer to make amends for British crimes committed against innocent colonised people. She came to Ireland offering 'sincere thoughts' and 'deep sympathy', and the Irish were expected to respond with 'forbearance and conciliation'. She must have forgotten that the Irish people (in the Republic at least) are no longer her subjects. We now decide what we do and how

we respond. She should have spoken only for herself, her troops and her government, something she failed to do.

Had she used that opportunity to accept responsibility for British crimes and brutality in Ireland, had she accepted blame and said she was deeply sorry for British behaviour, and had she offered to make amends in some way, then she and her people might have begun to learn the lessons of their history. But she did not – and they have not. Could it be that her decision not to go down the path of conciliation taken by her Prime Minister, David Cameron, was influenced by the fact that the British Army Regiment responsible for the atrocity of Bloody Sunday, so rightly castigated by Lord Saville in his report of the previous year, was the 1st Battalion Parachute Regiment, whose Colonel-in-Chief was none other than her son and heir, Prince Charles?

Whatever the Queen's reasons, her Prime Minister's rare and courageous attempt in 2010 to do the right and decent thing, to refuse to hide behind bluff and ambiguity, but to admit responsibility and culpability for what happened in Derry in January 1972, and to issue a heartfelt apology, must now be seen as a mere aberration, a flash in the pan, not to be repeated. The British norm, as demonstrated by Queen Elizabeth II in 2011, and by her High Commissioner to India in 2019, is in direct contrast to the approach taken by David Cameron in 2010.

It is worth noting that a rather cold eye was cast on David Cameron's admission and apology by other sectors of the British public. In 2016, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), who conducted a murder enquiry after the Saville findings regarding Bloody Sunday, presented a report to the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) of Northern Ireland. In 2019, the PPS decided there was only enough evidence to prosecute one soldier, Soldier F, in connection with the killings of two of the Derry demonstrators, James Wray and William McKinney; for the attempted murder of four others, Patrick O'Donnell, Joseph Friel, Joe Mahon and Michael Quinn; and for the attempted murder of a person or persons unknown, much to the disappointment of the relatives of the dead and injured.

Since then, the British government has offered full welfare support and legal costs to soldier F. Additionally, calls made in high places to outlaw criminal prosecutions against serving military personnel during the Troubles, has manifested into a Legacy Bill currently going through the British parliament which, if passed, will prevent the holding of Inquests into deaths that occurred during the Troubles, as well as Police Ombudsman investigations, civil cases and police investigations in certain circumstances, thereby

preventing the truth of who was behind such deaths being revealed. The Bill shows the increasing determination of Britian's Tory government to distance itself from its obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights.[4]

The British public has also made its voice heard, with thousands of ex-servicemen, and their supporters, taking to the streets of London in September 2019. They complained that the targeting of ex-soldiers for prosecution was a political move to appease Irish republicans. But, in fact, the PSNI had been involved in the reinvestigation of several killings committed during the Troubles, following advances in forensic evidence and the availability of witnesses. Of the twenty-six prosecution cases brought by them in such legacy cases, twenty-one (81%) have been *against* republican and loyalist paramilitaries.

The Queen's attitude, and that of her High Commissioner to India, towards Britain's colonial outrages in the past, quite probably contributed to, and gave support to, the arrogance and sense of superiority and entitlement that sections of the British public, and their political representatives and leaders, invariably demonstrate. As for learning the lessons of history, they are never going to do that willingly. Instead, they desperately cling to the illusions of Empire, and proudly sing *Rule Britannia,* even as their ship sinks.

But it goes deeper than that. By rewriting history (or simply by hiding it), by using devious and disingenuous language in an attempt to evade responsibility and culpability (as with the Amritsar speech), and by insinuating that both sides are equally to blame for past atrocities (as with the Queen's Dublin Castle speech), those representing the British State have skilfully presented to the world a modern narrative where they are the peacekeepers (even David Cameron's speech goes on to claim this), bravely trying to stop the warring tribes of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland from killing each other. In other words, from the time of the Adventurers of Elizabeth I's reign, to the enlisted British Army soldiers of Elizabeth II's reign, the British have never wavered in perpetuating the ludicrous lie that their sole purpose in being in Ireland was to bring peace and civilisation to the barbaric Irish!

[4] Shortly before the publication of this book, the 'Legacy Bill' was passed by the British parliament and became the 'Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023'. Plans are already afoot, by a wide variety of affected people and organisations, to challenge the Act's constitutional basis, considering that it clearly breaches Britain's commitments and obligations under international treaties, such as the Good Friday Agreement and the European Convention on Human Rights. The newly elected Labour government (July 2024) has committed to rescinding the Act.

Hopefully, this book will help to expose that absurd and shameful lie for what it is, as well as many others they have used to justify their presence in Ireland. The British will, eventually, be forced to learn the lessons of history that they have evaded for so long.

Finally, a word about the third objective of this book, which is to demonstrate how close Ireland's ties to Europe have been during the centuries under examination. Paradoxically, Britain's decision to leave the European Union, and resulting debates and actions, have raised an awareness of, and interest in, Ireland's past among our European neighbours. Hopefully they will find the information in this book interesting and informative because, although dominated and marginalised by England/Britain for centuries, Ireland never lost its links with various European countries during those times, when help and assistance (in both directions) was often to the fore, generously given and gratefully received

As for the format of this book, it is an examination of England's/Britain's hostilities against Ireland, during the centuries from the reigns of Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II, illustrated through the lens of the lives of seven very different Irish people, showing how those hostilities were resisted by them and their contemporaries. Although all seven were involved, in one way or another, in resisting English/British rule in Ireland, not all of them were successful (in the generally accepted meaning of that term). Far from it. And not all of them took up arms against the oppressive, and far more powerful, State they opposed: their resistance sometimes took on very different forms. Some of them may not be very well known, and some of them might be regarded as having done little to resist English/British rule in Ireland. On the contrary, all of them have contributed enormously to that resistance – in terms of selfless effort and sacrifice – and to the achievement of reaching the ultimate goal of political and cultural independence. Most have brought an awareness of their cause to a wide, international audience. If some did not, it was perhaps because their efforts were of necessity covert and secretive. And if the efforts of all of them did not bear fruit immediately, we must remember that the struggle for freedom has existed in Ireland for a very long time and has not yet concluded.

My chosen seven Irish heroes comprise six men and one woman. It is a truism that the history of women's role in Ireland's struggle for freedom has been neglected and marginalised, despite the fact that they played an important and active part. In choosing just one woman to write about, I apologise to the many other outstanding women I have had to pass over, such as Granuaile (Grace O'Malley), Ann Devlin, Lady Gregory, Countess Markievicz, Máiréad Farrell and Bernadette Devlin, to name but a few, all of

whom struggled against, and heroically resisted, English/British rule in Ireland. My choice, Betsy Gray, active during the late 1700s, is relatively unknown. But she was equally outstanding, as will be seen.

My chosen men are: Hugh O'Neill (late 1500s/early 1600s); Charles O'Conor of Belanagare (1700s); Eugene O'Curry (mid-1800s); Padraig Pearse (late 1800s/early 1900s); Michael Collins (early 1900s) and Bobby Sands (late 1900s).

Taken together, the lives of these seven people span the centuries between the reigns of Elizabeth I and Elizabeth II. Their backgrounds are diverse, ranging from Gaelic aristocracy to Planter stock; from Roman Catholics to Presbyterian Protestants; from scholars to soldiers; and from poets to working class poor. Their beliefs, both religious and political, were not restricted to Catholic nationalism. One of the most enduring achievements of these seven chosen Irish people is that they kept the flame of resistance alive and inspired succeeding generations to rekindle it.

The achievement of total independence for Ireland, when it finally comes, will not be claimed by any single generation, organisation, campaign or person. It will be a cumulative and collective achievement of Irish men and Irish women, both sung and unsung heroes, such as the ones depicted in this book.

As for the relationship between Britain and Ireland, which has for so long been one of oppressor vs. oppressed, that is now changing beyond recognition. Although, as with my family, thousands, indeed millions, of Irish people have emigrated to Britain to earn a living and escape from a homeland which could not provide them with the means of survival, that relationship was not merely a benevolent one on Britain's part. Britain's economic and political policies, over centuries, ensured that Ireland never reached its economic potential. The Irish poor and dispossessed provided a steady stream of low-paid workers, soldiers and grateful subjects for the British economy. But, at times when the Irish population, desperately seeking relief, became too great, they were simply left to starve to death or emigrate to America, which they did in their millions during the Great Hunger of the mid-nineteenth century, even though by that time Ireland had been joined in political union with Britain as a single, sovereign State (the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland) and the starving Irish were citizens of that same State.

Now, however, the Irish are no longer forced to emigrate on former terms. Nowadays, those who emigrate are often highly educated professionals and can take their pick of countries from all over the world. Membership of the European Union by both Ireland

and Britain, and Britain's recent decision to leave it, have thrown up all sorts of issues which show how inter-dependent both countries have become, and what complex constitutional problems arise when one tries to break free of the other (especially concerning Northern Ireland). It must have been obvious to anyone watching the political drama which ensued from their recent decision to leave the EU, and their negotiations over exit terms, that British politicians and media resorted to historical type, with 'divide and rule' tactics, false accusations, anti-Irish propaganda, attempts at bullying and even bribery in an attempt to get the Irish to give in to British demands. Unfortunately for them, Ireland's membership of the EU, as well as the international peace treaty of the Belfast Agreement, meant that the Irish no longer 'doffed the cap to their betters'. The other twenty-six members of the EU stood by Ireland's rights, Ireland's needs and EU policies to ensure that Britain's bully-boy tactics were thwarted. For that support we owe them our heartful gratitude.

It is not possible in this version of the relationship between Ireland and England to take account of, challenge and refute every assertion expected to arise from pro-British historians as to the events to be described. I have already undertaken, and successfully completed, one PhD thesis and have no intention, never mind not having enough years of my life left, to commence another work of similar size to rebut such anticipated allegations. Besides, those who believe the propaganda initiated by the British State, and willingly bought into by so many British people, are not searching for a new comprehension, or a new reality. They are quite content with the superior sense of 'exceptionalism' that they have convinced themselves they have earned, or are otherwise entitled to. I have not set out to convince such people otherwise. Rather, my readership, I hope, will be Irish people, and people of Irish descent, many of whom will never have learned the history of Ireland that has been outlined in this book. They may never have benefited from an opportunity to hear anything but Britain's version of our common history, or learned how to assess such information critically. But they know, intuitively, how they feel about England. This book is an attempt to give them concrete evidence of what the British/English have done to our people in a way that is, hopefully, interesting, truthful and easier to understand than a dry history of Kings and Queens, battles and dates.

Finally, a word about the book's publication. Along with my late husband, Donal Ó Síodhacháin, I operated a small publishing house (Cló Duanaire/Irish and Celtic Publications) specialising in Irish history, folklore, biographies and poetry. When Donal died, in 2012, I continued with this enterprise in a limited way, publishing several books

along the way, including an anthology of all of his poetry (entitled *The Flame Lives On*) and a biography of the Donegal poet and actress Madge Herron (entitled *Madge, Portrait of Donegal Actress and Poet Madge Herron*), as well as several others, including one describing the scandal of child sexual abuse and cover up within the legal fraternity in Ireland (entitled *Dear Karen – Nine Letters from Ireland to America*). But my ability to write, produce and sell such books is now coming to an end. This will probably be the last one, and I have decided to approach its publication in a different way: I am publishing a digital edition on an internet platform, thus helping the planet by being carbon neutral, and gifting this work to today's and future generations of Irish people, free of charge. It is their history and heritage and it seems apt that it be made freely available to them.

Chapter One

Early History of Ireland

Pre-history – Elizabethan Period

UP UNTIL THE beginning of the ninth century AD, Ireland had existed in relative peace and prosperity for thousands of years, despite several foreign invasions having taken place. A version of the history of those millennia is written in the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann*, or *The Book of Invasions of Ireland*, which was compiled by Christian monks, between the eighth and eleventh century, from memorised historical accounts that had been passed down by word of mouth, in poetry, legends and myths, over hundreds of generations. *The Book of Invasions*, synthesising various tales of the invasions of Ireland, is considered by most historians to be a work of myth rather than a true history, designed to provide the Irish race with a place in the biblical history of the world. Nevertheless, even if such theory is true, that history has been very influential in forming the mind-set of the Irish people and it is worthwhile looking briefly at what it tells us.

Cessair

According to the Annals, five of the six pre-Christian invasions of Ireland involved sons, or close descendants, of Noah.[5] The first people to arrive in Ireland, it is claimed, were the offspring of Noah's son, Bith. Having been denied a place on the Ark, they sailed westwards from Egypt to survive the predicted flood. Many died on the journey, but Bith's daughter, Cessair, along with forty-nine other women and three men, survived the voyage and landed at Bantry Bay in Cork.

The influence of druidic myth, legend and philosophy becomes very evident when the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann* recounts that all of the remaining men subsequently died when

[5] It is not possible to put definitive dates on events that happened so long ago, but informed estimates have been suggested, e.g. that the time span between Adam and Noah was c. 5,000 years.

the Great Flood hit Ireland, except for one, Fintán**,** who was transformed into a salmon and, over time, into an eagle and then a hawk, and who existed for a further five thousand years.[6] Cessair, his lover, died of a broken heart when separated from him, and the other women died in the Deluge.

Fintán returned to human form in order to recount the history of Ireland over those years, while Cessair became one of Ireland's goddesses, associated mostly with power, sexuality and agriculture.

Parthalon

After the deaths of Cessair's people, Ireland lay uninhabited for many hundreds of years until the arrival of Parthalon, a descendant of another of Noah's sons, Magog. It is recorded that Parthalon, along with two thousand followers, came from Greece (Macedonia) and lived in Ireland for approximately three hundred – five hundred years. During this time, they engaged in battle with the Fomorians, fierce legendary sea-based giants who inhabited the western coastal areas of Ireland, such as Tory Island in County Donegal. Eventually, by which time the people of Parthalon had risen to nine thousand, all except one perished in a plague. Like Fintán before him, Tuan mac Carell, the sole survivor, transformed in succession into a deer, a wild boar, a young man, an old man, an eagle and a salmon, until he finally reverted into an adult human male, in order to recall otherwise forgotten events of Irish history.

Nemed

After Parthalon's invasion and his people's subsequent decimation, Ireland again lay uninhabited for many years until the arrival of Nemed, another descendant of Noah. His people fought and won four battles against the Fomorians. But eventually, as with Parthalon's people, many died from the plague. The Fomorians started to oppress those who remained, demanding that they hand over their children and their food. The remaining Nemedians rose up against the Fomorians, but most were killed in the ensuing battle. However, one shipload managed to escape. Some went to Greece, some to Northern countries, and others to Britain.

[6] The meanings associated with these transformations are described later in this Chapter.

Fir Bolg

Those Nemedians who sailed to Greece became known as the Fir Bolg. They endured two hundred years of enslavement in Greece, before escaping and sailing back to Ireland. They are best remembered for dividing Ireland into five provinces, and for the fact that nine of their number ruled Ireland as High Kings for the next forty years. Some historians believe that the Fir Bolg did actually exist and that they may have been Celts.[7]

The Tuatha Dé Danann

The Tuatha Dé Danann (the people of the goddess Danu) were those Nemedians who had sailed northwards from Ireland, to Denmark and the north of Scotland, and who returned to fight for the control of Ireland against the Fir Bolg in Moytura, County Mayo. Generous victors of the battle, the Tuatha Dé Danann offered one of Ireland's provinces to the Fir Bolg, who chose Connacht. The defeated Fir Bolg retreated there, where they built the fort of Dún Aengus on Inis Mór. Unlike the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann were a highly civilised and spiritual people. Of them, Tuan mac Carell, said '*everyone knows that from them the learned men of Ireland are sprung'*. *The Annals of the Four Masters*[8] claims that they ruled Ireland from 1897 BC to 1700 BC, until the arrival of the Milesians.

The Milesians

The last pre-Christian invaders of Ireland were the Milesians. Originally from ancient Scythia, these people had travelled west, via Egypt, Greece, Crete, Gothland and Spain, in fulfilment of a druidic prediction that they *"would one day possess a far-off western isle"*.[9] Their leader, Milesius, died in Spain before reaching Ireland. His uncle, Íth, did land in Ireland but was killed by the Tuatha Dé Danann and his body sent back to Spain. Then Milesius' wife, Scotia, nine of their sons and nine of Íth's brothers, sailed back to Ireland to launch an invasion and engage battle with the Tuatha Dé Danann.

At Sliabh Mis in County Kerry, the Tuatha Dé Danann were defeated. Control over Ireland passed to Milesius' son, Heremon, from whom a long line of Kings emerged, culminating in Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair (Roderic O'Connor), who ruled from 1166 AD to 1198 AD, and

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[7] Rev EA D'Alton, *History of Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day,* vol. 1 (London, 1912).
[8] The *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland (Annála Ríoghachta Éireann),* aka *The Annals of the Four Masters* (*Annála na gCeithre Máistrí*), comprise a history of Ireland spanning the years between the Deluge and 1616 AD. They were compiled between 1632 AD and 1636 AD by Franciscan friars Mícheál Ó Cléirigh, Cú Chroigcríche Ó Clerigh, Fearfeasa O Maoil Chonaire and Conaire Cleirigh in County Donegal.
[9] D'Alton, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

was the last High King of Ireland before the Norman Invasion. As for the defeated Tuatha Dé Danann, it is said they rejected human manifestation and concerns, and retired to the realms of the fairy kingdom, in the hills, rocks and woodlands of Ireland, where they live to this day.

While no historically reliable written records of these events exist, other sources, such as archaeology, lend some support. However, we do know that the druidic culture of both the Tuatha Dé Danann and the Milesians relied heavily on the oral transmission of learning. When this oral learning was eventually recorded in writing, by Christian monks from the seventh century AD on, a vast wealth of information on Ireland's history, invasions, myths, culture, laws, poetry and genealogy was revealed, and preserved for posterity, often in beautifully transcribed and illustrated manuscripts. Unfortunately, many of these manuscripts were destroyed and lost during subsequent invasions of Ireland by Vikings, Normans and English. Thankfully, however, some manuscripts had been taken out of the country by Irish missionary monks, who set up centres of learning in Europe in the seventh century, during the Dark Ages following the fall of the Roman Empire. Had not those Irish monks brought their manuscript tradition to the relative safety of Europe, those treasures would probably have been completely destroyed.[10]

The Celts

The foregoing gives a brief outline of the mythical history of the origins of the Irish people. Gaelic Ireland looks to the Milesians, and to Spain, for her historical origins and allegiance. The stories contained in the ancient Annals provide an abundance of colour, daring and bravery, and demonstrate a belief in the supernatural world, in gods and goddesses, and in Druids and magic. When the Christian scribes transferred the tales from the oral to the written word, they were faced with a dilemma as to how to record, in writing, elements of the tales that they, as Christians, did not believe in. The compromise was that, in Irish manuscripts, Christian ideology was clearly affixed to tales, poetry and historical records as an addendum, and never wholly replaced the pre-Christian original. Sometimes the scribes made a note for the reader, to make it clear that they themselves did not believe in these supernatural fables. But other factors, too, came into play.

It is well known that Christianity, world-wide, superimposed its own religious ideology on the indigenous beliefs, practices and traditions of the people being converted, but in

[10] See later in this Chapter for more details.

Ireland the situation was different. The Irish Catholic Church, known as the Celtic Church, operated for hundreds of years beyond the control of Rome, and its clerics continued to train in pre-Christian (or druidic) practices, such as 'out of body' experiences, and to adhere to pre-Christian beliefs, such as reincarnation.

When Ireland was Christianised, the conversion was not carried out by force and there were no purges of druidic positions or ideology, because the Christian message was not so very different from the druidic one. Druids, by another name, came to control the newly created monasteries and they remained in charge of schools of education, languages, poetry and law. They changed their names to *filidh* (poets, singular *file*), later Bards, and continued on very much as before. As a result, the manuscripts transcribed by Irish Christian monks are a fairly faithful replication of the beliefs and accounts of the people and times they describe. The scribes respected the beliefs of the ancient people, even if they did not wholly adhere to them.

However, an alternative, more academically acceptable, history overlaps that of the biblical-influenced *Book of Invasions*: that of the Celtic invasion of Ireland. The exact date when the Celts of eastern Europe landed in Ireland is disputed, but persuasive evidence suggests that it was in the second millennium BC.[11]

One theory is that the Celts, whose original homeland was Bohemia,[12] were of Indo-Aryan origin and travelled westwards in search of the sun. This group split into two. In 1200 BC one group, the lowland Celts, emerged from the Danube region and travelled further west from there, as far as Ireland. They were distinguished from the other group in that they herded cattle, grew crops, made crafts and cremated their dead. Their religious beliefs were matriarchal, and they co-existed peacefully with the people amongst whom they settled.

The second group (the so-called 'true Celts') emanated from the mountainous regions of the Balkans and were living west of the Danube around the sixth century BC. They were an aristocratic, class-based military people, who often became mercenary elements of the great armies of Europe. As fighting Celts, they sacked Rome and Delphi and conquered westwards over Europe as far as the British Isles. They were renowned for their chivalry,

[11] See M Hope, *The Ancient Wisdom of the Celts* (London, 1987).
[12] In modern day Czech Republic.

courage and bravery as well as their music, poetry and philosophy. Unlike the lowland Celts, they buried their dead.

Despite evidence that a distinct group of Celts existed and migrated westwards from as early as 1200 BC, most historians refer only to the two main periods of Celtic civilisation: the Hallstatt (from 800 BC to 450 BC) and La Tène (from 450 BC to the time of Caesar's campaign against the Celts on the Continent, around the time of Christ's birth), possibly because these classifications look to archaeological finds and take no account of other evidence, such as language and literature. But Henri Hubert,[13] basing his conclusions on different dialects of the Gaelic language, concludes that some Celts did indeed migrate to Ireland during the second millennium BC, centuries before the main wave of Celtic immigrants to Britain in the sixth century BC.[14]

If we accept that the Lowland Celts came to Ireland c. 1200 BC, they would have found there an indigenous people who had studied the planets and the stars, and had built a calendar system using stone monuments and passage mounds; who had built walls to fence off their farmlands; and who had built roads to connect them to other communities, or to lead their cattle and sheep to other pastures. It is probable that those early Celts who came to Ireland, in common with other Celts throughout the history of their migrations, intermingled with, were influenced by, and learned from the indigenous people.

The acceptance of this time frame for the arrival of the early Celts in Ireland involves recognising that the Gaelic language predated their arrival, and that proto-Celts existed in Ireland at the mythical time of the Fir Bolg and the Tuatha Dé Danann. In the fourth millennium BC, before Stonehenge in England was built, these Irish proto-Celts had *"a well-developed philosophy concerning the creation of the world"*,[15] and had built the monument at Newgrange, as well as the passage mounds at Knowth and Dowth,[16] where internal passageways were aligned and illuminated by the rising and the setting of the sun at different solstices and equinoxes of the year. The alignment of the monuments to each

[13] H Hubert, *The History of the Celtic People* (London, 1992).

[14] To this day the Celtic language has survived in two distinct strata within western Europe: Irish, Scottish and Manx belong to the Goidelic strand, while Welsh, Cornish and Breton form the Brittonic strand.

[15] NL Thomas, *Irish Symbols of 3500 BC* (Cork, 1988), p. 16.

[16] Thomas asserts that these tombs and passages were built by the people as magic dwelling places for their gods. Carbon dating suggests construction dates of 3200 BC for Newgrange, and 3500 BC for the mound at Knowth, making Knowth the oldest building in Europe.

other shows that they were constructed with mathematical and astronomical exactitude, demonstrating their functional use as a calendar.

No one can dispute that the Celts of Gaul had their Druids, so well described by Julius Caesar in his account of the Gallic Wars[17] written in the first century BC. Of them Caesar said, *"they hold long discussions about the heavenly bodies and their movement, the size of the universe and of the earth, the order of nature, the power and capacities of the immortal gods"*.[18]

However, it is perhaps less well known, or accepted, that in Irish mythological history the Fir Bolg, the Tuatha Dé Danann and the Milesians also had their Druids, who were relied on to conjure up magic when required, and to communicate with the gods that they might intercede on their behalf in battle.[19]

Druids were learned men (and women) who were the possessors of all the knowledge of their day, which they had spent up to twenty-one years learning. They were also skilled in supernatural powers and were accomplished poets, genealogists, historians, law makers and judges. They held the highest positions in society, second only to the King.

One of the best-known poems in Irish literature is *The Song of Amergin*. Amergin was a son of Milesius, a brother of Heremon, a brehon (judge), a philosopher, a poet and a Druid. On first landing on Irish soil, Amergin incanted his great poem, full of imagery and Celtic philosophy, thereby putting his own stamp, and that of the Milesians, on Ireland's future from that moment on.

The Song of Amergin

I am the Wind that blows across the Sea;

I am the Wave of the Ocean;

I am the Murmur of the Billows;

I am the Bull of the Seven Combats;

I am the Vulture of the Rock;

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[17] M Hadas (trans.), *The Gallic War and Other Writings of Julius Caesar* (Toronto, 1957).
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 14.
[19] As evidence that the Tuatha Dé Danann were familiar with reincarnation, one of the basic beliefs of Celtic (or druidic) philosophy, we are told that Tuan mac Carrel, in the embodiment of an eagle, watched the approach of the Milesians: *"As he and his people drew towards Erin, they brought no foreign lore. For Tuan, as a 'great eagle of the sea' witnessed their coming, himself the very personification of their ritual"*. Source: H Pim, *A Short History of Celtic Philosophy* (Dundalk, 1920), p. 30.

I am a Ray of the Sun;

I am the Fairest of Flowers;

I am a Wild Boar in Valour;

I am a Salmon in the Pool;

I am a Lake on the Plain;

I am the skill of the Craftsman;

I am a Word of Science;

I am the spear-point that gives Battle;

I am the god who creates in man the Fire of Thought;

Who is it that Enlightens the Assembly upon the mountain, if not I?

Who tells the ages of the moon, if not I?

Who shows the place where the sun goes to rest, if not I?

Who calls the cattle from the House of Tethra?

On whom do the cattle of Tethra smile?

Who is the god that fashions enchantments —

The enchantment of battle and the wind of change?[20]

Exploring the significance of this poem for an understanding of Celtic philosophy, Alexei Kondratiev[21] argues that the first thirteen lines of the poem represent the thirteen lunar months of the year, along with the prevailing aspects of each month. As Amergin passes through each, he attains a complete wholeness and an entire perspective, which lends him authority to stand as interpreter and mediator between the physical world and the Otherworld. If others wish to attain this perspective and authority, they too must *"experience these thirteen conditions of existence and become conscious of the cycle in which they successively occur"*.[22]

Kondratiev also explains the Celtic animal imagery of the poem. For example, the stag and boar are creatures of the Otherworld, one representing daytime, the other night-time,

[20] This translation of the poem, from the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann* (*The Book of Invasions*), is found in Peter Berresford Ellis' work *The Druids* (London, 1994).
[21] A Kondratiev, *Celtic Rituals: A Guide to Celtic Spirituality* (Cork, 2004).
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 206.

both crossing into our world as messengers or guides. The hawk, or eagle, represents awakened consciousness, while the salmon represents wisdom.

According to Peter O'Connor, when Amergin incants his declaration on landing on Ireland's shores, he is claiming mastery over all things on the earth and in the universe. He is also attesting his druidic powers to be greater than those of the Druids of the Tuatha Dé Danann.

"*At the same time he is heralding the moment when man claims sovereignty over the earth and the moment when Irish history, as such, begins. It is the ritualistic creation of a new order . . . The arrival of the mortal Sons of Mil in the land of the divine marks this division between the known and the unknown, the material and non-material universes.*"[23]

While O'Connor accepts that the belief in 'the Otherworld' is a universal one, he claims that Ireland's relationship with this other dimension is different: "*The Irish people, like their Celtic forbears, have a rich, living view of the Otherworld. Indeed . . . it is right alongside and around them all the time*".[24]

Milesian Culture

We know more about the Milesians (who were probably one and the same people as the Lowland Celts, said by Murray Hope to have landed in Ireland in 1200 BC) than about previous invaders of Ireland, not just from the Annals, but because they left behind a great deal of archaeological evidence of their lifestyle, homes, beliefs and artefacts.

For example, they maintained an advanced culture, artistically and politically, and retained links with the Continent. The people of this early Celtic period of the Bronze Age herded cattle, mined copper and gold and crafted ornaments for personal adornment, such as brooches. They also made tools, such as axes, daggers, swords and bridle bits, for functional use.[25]

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[23] P O'Connor, *Beyond the Mist, What Irish Mythology Can Teach Us About Ourselves* (London, 2000), pp. 85-86.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 86.
[25] J Raftery, *The Archaeology of the Celts* in J Raftery, (ed.), *The Celts* (Dublin, 1978). Joseph Raftery cites archaeological evidence that this culture in Ireland lasted down to the arrival of Christianity, pointing out that the society must therefore have been non-radical, conservative and relatively unchanging. It was only in the third century BC, during the early Iron Age, that Irish Celtic culture began to significantly change in archaeological terms. Iron instruments became the norm for everyday use, with the more expensive bronze being reserved for ceremonial use.

The wealthy overlords of this period, and the independent farmers, lived in houses surrounded by banks of earth or dry-stone walls. In marshy land, as well as at the edge of lakes or in artificial lakes, wooden houses, called crannogs, were built. Their burial practices were both cremation and inhumation in unmarked graves, with the bodies extended at full length and aligned facing east towards the rising sun (a common practice to this day in Catholic graveyards in rural Ireland). They carved ancient stones with spirals, curves and triskeles, similar to stones that have been discovered in Brittany and the Rhineland.

Summing up his analysis of archaeological evidence supporting a high culture in Ireland, and a people who were well organised and considerably wealthy, Raftery says:

"The degree of civilisation of the people of Ireland during the last centuries BC and the first centuries AD was very advanced; so much so, indeed, that the combination of the established Iron Age culture with the new ideas which Christianity brought in its train rendered inevitable, it seems to me, the development of an art and a spiritual mission which were destined to become in time the wonder of the western world".[26]

The Ancient Laws of Ireland

In addition to archaeological evidence, the manuscript evidence of *The Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland*[27] gives a fascinating insight into the daily life of Ireland's Celts, both before and after the introduction of Christianity.

From them we know that Irish society was based on self-sufficiency mixed farming, involving sheep, cattle and pig rearing and the growing of cereals. Land usage was based on a Lord advancing stock or land to his clients and receiving rent or services in return. The wealth produced from this system supported a hierarchy of professional classes, as well as Lords and Kings, with each large area (or country) having its King, and the *Ard Rí*, or High King, based at Tara in County Meath.

Other divisions in society distinguished between the privileged free and the non-privileged free; the free and the non-free; and slaves. While everyone had a status and a corresponding honour price, these could change, thereby providing upward and downward social mobility. Accordingly, a person's position in society could rise or fall as

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.
[27] *The Ancient Laws and Institute of Ireland, Volumes I – VI,* (Dublin and London, 1865-1901).

a result of his or her own efforts, or failures. Status, therefore, was very important. The person with the highest status, the King or Queen, could lose his/her status and honour price e.g. by doing work that was beneath them, by giving a bad judgment or by showing cowardice in battle. Within other divisions of society, the honour price of men determined the honour price of their wives and children.

Membership of a kin-group was also an important aspect of life in Ireland, with every person belonging to one. Kin-groups were made up of descendants of the same great-grandfather, through the male line. As with Kings, the head of each kin-group was elected. Along with this status came power and control over the group's *tuath*,[28] although there was also a degree of private land ownership. Kin-groups were responsible for the actions of their law-breaking members, who had to reimburse the group for compensation awarded to victims of their crimes, or else lose membership of the kin-group and end up as persons with no legal rights.

Women were not without independent rights: a woman could own land in her own name (e.g. from an inheritance), but she was encouraged to marry within the kin-group so that on her death the land would revert to the group. Women could also enter into contracts, the most important one being marriage, as the type of marriage a woman entered into determined the other type of contracts she could make. Other factors also influenced a woman's ability to make contracts, such as the wealth she brought to the marriage; her membership of, and status within, her own *tuath*; the behaviour of her husband; and whether she was his principal wife. Some contracts could not be entered into by a woman's husband without her consent.

Polygamy (a man having more than one wife) was legal, with the sons of each of a man's wives having the same status. Where a marriage had broken down, a woman could obtain a divorce in her own right, provided she had grounds, which included: being rejected for another woman; the failure of her husband to provide maintenance; serious domestic violence; and being lied about or satirised by her husband. In such circumstances she could retain her bride-price on divorce.

Other grounds for a woman divorcing her husband included his failure to carry out marital duties because of impotence, sterility or homosexuality, or relating intimate details of the couple's sexual relations to others. But a woman who entered into a marriage with

[28] A *tuath* was a portion of land owned by the Lord of a kin-group, in trust for all the members of the group.

prior knowledge of her spouse's incapacities (such as sterility, or his being a man of the church), could not rely on those incapacities as grounds for divorce.

A woman was expected to be faithful during marriage, but not if she had indicated, before marriage, that she would not be. Grounds for a man divorcing his wife included: her being unfaithful; her bringing shame on her husband; her inducing an abortion; her causing infanticide or her being without milk through illness.

Rules governing divorce settlements specified that the amount each party took away from the marriage depended on what they each brought to it, and by how much each of them worked to make the marriage profitable. After divorcing, the woman returned to the protection of her kin-group, with whom she would have maintained close ties.

There were many other laws covering all aspects of everyday life, too many to mention here. There was also a sophisticated legal system that included law schools, law Courts and professional lawyers and judges. In short, the Brehon Laws which governed Ireland for thousands of years, from the Milesian invasion c. 1200 BC, right up to the time of the Plantation of Ulster c. 1607, were highly comprehensive, highly organised and, above all, were considered just and fair.

Up until the arrival of Christianity, whether that was by way of St Patrick, as is popularly believed, or earlier through the teachings of Jesus' brother James via Spain, Druids and their Celtic philosophy effectively ruled all aspects of Irish life. The English lawyer, Sir John Davies, who as Solicitor General to Ireland in 1603, and Attorney General from 1606 to 1619, did his utmost to undermine and eradicate the Brehon Laws, nevertheless had to admit that:

"*there is no nation of people under the sunne that doth love equal and indifferent justice better than the Irish; or will rest better satisfied with the execution thereof, although it bee against themselves; so as they may have the protection and benefit of the lawe, when upon just cause they do desire it.*"[29]

Davies realised that in order to finally bring about a lasting conquest of Ireland, it was necessary for English Common Law to defeat Brehon Law in legal contests in Courts, in addition to the military forces of England defeating the Irish in physical war, and this – as we shall see in later Chapters – he succeeded in bringing about. While the English identified quite early on what was needed to beat the Irish, the Irish took longer to realise

[29] Sir J Davies, *A Discovery of the True Causes why Ireland was Never Subdued, Nor Brought Under Obedience of the Crown of England* (London, 1747), p. 283.

that they needed a knowledge of, and in some ways a re-discovery of, their lost culture (which included their laws and legal system) in order to defeat the English, as we will also see in later Chapters.

Christianity in Ireland

In contrast to England's all-out attack on the Brehon Laws, one of the Brehon Law texts describes how, when St Patrick arrived in Ireland in the fifth century AD, to convert the population to Christianity, he set up a committee of nine people (three Kings, three bishops and three poets) to look at how the laws could be amended or repealed. The text tells us:

"*What did not clash with the word of God in the written law and in the New Testament, and with the consciences of the believers, was confirmed in the laws of the Brehons by Patrick and by the ecclesiastics and the Chieftains of Erin; for the law of nature had been quite right, except the faith, and its obligations and the harmony of the church and the people*".[30]

In other words, a peaceful and mutually agreed accommodation of the two systems took place. Druids now became monks, professors, lawyers and poets. Society remained organised around Bardic principles, as reflected in the Brehon Laws. Ireland became well known in Europe and beyond for its spiritual learning, and monasteries became important social centres, where many foreigners came to learn from the wise monastic men and women of Ireland.

Irish Christian Monks in Europe

Then, after the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 AD,[31] during what is now known as 'the Dark Ages', Irish monks began to travel far and wide, eastwards and southwards, to rekindle and restore Europe's forgotten learning, which had survived intact in Ireland. On the European Continent they established monastic settlements in Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland between the sixth and twelfth centuries. This mission, at first religious and later educational, was carried out in a non-threatening, non-imperialist way, respectful of the cultures of the people they were ministering to.

The settlements of those Irish monks have been described as centres of rejuvenation, where education, from basic reading and writing to moral philosophy, was available to all; where spiritual, cultural and civic principles were re-established; where meditation and prayer

[30] *Senchus Mór, vol. I, Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland.*
[31] The Roman Empire had conquered most of Europe, including England, but the Romans never reached as far as Ireland.

were encouraged and given space; where centres for pilgrims were established and where land reclamation skills were put to use.

Many of those Irish monks, later venerated as saints by the Catholic Church, are to this day fondly remembered and commemorated throughout Europe.[32] Closer to home, the Irish monk St Colmcille[33] brought Christianity to Scotland in 563 AD, when he established a monastery on the island of Iona. Among other notable achievements, he established the scriptorium that was responsible for the production of the beautiful calligraphy and illustrations of biblical manuscripts, including the world-renowned masterpiece, *The Book of Kell*s. In 635 AD, St Aidan, one of St Colmcille's Irish monks, established a foundation at Lindisfarne on the north east coast of England and is credited with bringing Christianity to that part of England by converting the Anglo-Saxons of Northumbria to Christianity.

Ireland continued to thrive and excel in spiritual, scholarly and artistic pursuits until the next invasion, that of the Vikings.

The Vikings

At the end of the eighth century Ireland suffered another series of invasions, far more violent, more hostile and more damaging than those of the Tuatha Dé Danann or the Milesians. Vikings, from both Norway, and later Denmark, first arrived around 790 AD. These invaders typically attacked monasteries, looted their treasures, killed their inhabitants and took hostages. They travelled along the Irish coast in their longboats, searching for, and attacking, monasteries located near the coast. As we have seen, monasteries were important in Ireland, both as centres of population and community, as well as places of religious observation and learning, both spiritual and lay. As there was no powerful, centralised government or army in Ireland at that time, it was difficult to wage a pan-national offensive against the Vikings, resulting in both defence and opposition tactics being left to local Chieftains.

In later years, Vikings arrived in bigger boats, which allowed them to travel further inland, where they established more permanent settlements. They built ports at Limerick, Cork, Dublin, Waterford and Wexford, and introduced trading and commerce with Britain and the European Continent. They made alignments with native Irish forces and became

[32] St Columbanus was the most prolific, having established many monasteries, including in Germany (Wettingen-Meherau), Italy (Bobbio) and France (Ferrières and Luxeuil), from 590 to 615 AD.
[33] In Scotland he is better known as St Columba.

involved in Irish inter-tribal rivalry and wars. They also intermarried with the Irish population and even converted to Christianity. Additionally, they taught the Irish how to wage battle and how to use weapons.

They were finally defeated by the High King of Ireland, Brian Boru, in a pitched battle at Clontarf in 1014, although some, such as King Sihtric Silkbeard in Dublin, remained in power and control for several years after that. However, by the mid-11th century they had left Ireland, having given up on ever colonising the country or the people.

The Normans

By the twelfth century, Ireland was still ruled by local Kings, all of whom were in contention to become the High King of Ireland. The death of one such High King, Muircheartach Mac Loughlainn, who died in 1156, prompted his successor, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, to eliminate competition from his main rival for the High Kingship, Diarmuid Mac Mhurchada (Dermot MacMorrough), the King of Leinster, by forcibly exiling him from Ireland.

In seeking to regain his kingdom, MacMorrough sought help from King Henry II of England, promising him land and influence in Ireland in exchange for military help from his soldiers based in his Norman territories in France. When Henry agreed, MacMorrough's expedition was joined by Lord Richard de Clare, the Third Earl of Pembroke, also known as Strongbow. They landed in Ireland in 1170 and MacMorrough quickly retook his kingship. To consolidate his power he gave his daughter, Aoife, in marriage to Strongbow, promising that he would also inherit his (MacMorrough's) throne. This he did, in 1171.

On learning of this, Henry II, fearing an alternative Norman stronghold in Ireland, determined to establish his own authority there. In 1155 Pope Adrian IV (an Englishman) had already issued a Papal Bull (*Laudabiliter*), giving Henry permission to invade and take control of Ireland, by virtue of the Catholic Church's assumed right to the ownership of most of western Europe. In 1172 Pope Alexander III, Adrian's successor, ratified the donation of Ireland to the English Crown.

Following Strongbow's succession in 1171, Henry landed his troops in Ireland, took Waterford and Dublin, and awarded them to his son John, whom he called *Dominus Hiberniae* (Lord of Ireland). When John later became King John of England, the Lordship of Ireland came directly under the control of the English Crown.

Then Henry II and the Irish High King, Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair, made a peace pact[34] and, with Diarmuid and Strongbow dead,[35] things in Ireland proceeded much as before. The local Kings did not object to Henry, who returned to England. But by 1177 more invasions by Normans took place in Ulster, Limerick and north Munster.

Those new Normans introduced walled towns, churches and castles, as well as changes to land use, such as establishing tenant farmers, feudalism and commerce, in direct contrast to the land ownership, land use and communal bartering systems set out in the Brehon Laws.

Changes also took place in Catholic Church organisation in Norman-controlled areas. There was a move away from monasteries, in favour of churches and dioceses, which were more centrally controllable, and allowed Church tithe records to be compiled and implemented. Royal towns were established by charter, commencing with Dublin in 1192, allowing townspeople more economic opportunities and rights than before. Norman families, such as the Fitzgeralds, the Butlers and de Burghs, gained ownership of great areas of land. In 1297 they established a parliament in Ireland.

However, the control of Ireland by the Normans was patchy. As they moved westwards, away from Dublin, they began to use the Irish language, to adopt Irish clothing and customs, to inter-marry with the natives and to become *'more Irish than the Irish themselves'*. By 1300 the Normans in Ireland were in decline. Irish Chieftains had started to defend their own territories and attack the power of the Normans, with the result that Normans in Ireland were now less important to King Henry III and his successor, Edward I, than their other preoccupations. This in turn meant less financial and military assistance for them than had previously been given.

In addition, rivalry between different factions of Normans developed, resulting in hostilities among themselves. Their land-holding power also suffered, as each estate, once immense and powerful, became diminished in size and wealth as a result of their system of the division of estates among heirs at death.

Edward Bruce, King of Scots

In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, further significant events occurred. In 1315 Edward Bruce of Scotland (brother of Robert Bruce, King of Scots) invaded Ireland and

[34] The Treaty of Windsor, 1175.
[35] Diarmuid in 1171 and Strongbow in 1176.

helped Irish Lords in their fight against the English, resulting in many Lords regaining land that had been lost during the Norman conquest. Some Anglo-Irish Lords sided with Bruce, who was eventually defeated by the English at the Battle of Faughart, near Dundalk, in 1318.

Sickness and famine also took its toll in Ireland during this period. Between 1315 and 1317 a famine, which had affected Europe, reached Ireland, resulting in many deaths. In 1348 the Black Death killed around one third of the people in heavily populated towns (who were more likely to be Anglo-Irish than those living in rural areas). English-controlled areas fell back to places around Dublin (the Pale), while Irish customs and language started to be observed again by the 'Old English' (also known as the 'Normans' or 'Anglo-Irish'), who were increasingly siding with the Irish against England, and who remained Catholic during and after the Reformation in Ireland. In 1367, the Statutes of Kilkenny forbade those of English descent from inter-marrying with native Irish, from speaking the Irish language and from adopting Irish dress and customs. But the English found it impossible to enforce the new laws.

While England and France were at war, from 1337 to 1453, Ireland did not preoccupy the minds of English royalty. When the Hundred Years War ended, the English turned their aggression inwards, culminating in the War of the Roses (1460-1485). During this prolonged period, English authority in Ireland was delegated to the Anglo-Norman Fitzgerald family, who acted for the King as Lords Deputy of Ireland, in control of the Pale region around Dublin.

The Tudor Dynasty

The final battle of the Civil War in England between the Houses of Lancaster and York, which ended the War of the Roses, was the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. The House of Lancaster, headed by Henry Tudor, won. Crowned King Henry VII, he established the Royal House of Tudor. The Plantagenet regime of the House of York, led by Richard III, was over. However Henry Tudor later married Elizabeth of York, daughter of Edward IV (Richard III's brother), and in so doing not alone unified the warring Royal Houses but ensured the Tudor line of succession to the English Crown.[36]

[36] Six Tudor monarchs reigned over the next 118 years: Henry VII (1485-1509); Henry VIII (1509-1547); Edward VI (1547-1553); Jane 1 (1553); Mary I (1553-1588); and Elizabeth I (1588-1603).

When Henry VII was crowned King of England, he also automatically became Lord of Ireland. But the Irish Fitzgeralds, holders of the Lords Deputy of Ireland positions, were Yorkist supporters. They continued to give support to Yorkist rebellions, for example by providing troops in support of a plan to put the alleged Earl of Warwick, a boy named Lambert Simnel, on the throne in 1487. In 1491, another insurgence by Perkin Warbeck, claiming to be Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York (one of the 'Princes in the Tower'), invaded Ireland, and later England. However, neither of these attempts to overthrow Henry VII succeeded.

Introduction of Poynings' Law

As Lord of Ireland, Henry VII decided to take control of the Irish parliament, but with the 8th Earl of Kildare, a Gaelicised Norman, retaining his position as Lord Deputy of Ireland, and Irish clans becoming increasingly powerful outside of the Pale, there was little he could achieve.[37] At one point, he replaced the Earl of Kildare and substituted Sir Edward Poynings in his place. He reorganised the English system of government in Ireland by fundamentally changing how bills were passed. In future, parliamentary bills would proceed for royal assent, and would be shaped or reshaped by the King, without any control exercised by the Irish parliament, other than rejection or acceptance. Outside the Pale, the Gaelic regions, under the control of their clan Chieftains, continued to adhere to their own customs, laws, language and dress. Henry VII never succeeded in imposing a centralised government in Ireland.

The Reformation and Henry VIII

Henry VII died in 1509 and was succeeded by his son Henry VIII. This Henry is best remembered for marrying six wives (and executing two of them), for introducing the Reformation to England and Ireland and for the sacking of English and Irish monasteries.

In England, Henry VIII led his loyal subjects away from the Roman Catholic religion and established the new Church of England, not for reasons of disputed scripture or dogma, but because he was locked in a power struggle with the Pope. He had married Catherine of Aragon, a Spanish princess, in 1509, shortly after becoming King. Catherine had previously been married to Henry's brother, Arthur, who had died seven years earlier. A

[37] It was not until the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I that control of Ireland was fully achieved by the English Crown.

special dispensation for the marriage had been granted by Pope Clement VII, partly on the basis that the marriage between Arthur and Catherine had never been consummated.

However, Catherine did not bear Henry VIII a son and heir, although she did give birth to a daughter, Mary. Over time Henry grew tired of Catherine, preferring Anne Boleyn, whom he determined to marry, despite the Pope's refusal to annul Henry's marriage to Catherine. The Archbishop of Canterbury, acting on Henry's instructions, declared that Henry's marriage to Catherine was invalid, on the grounds that it was against scripture for a man to marry the wife of his brother. Henry then divorced Catherine in 1533, proceeded to marry Anne Boleyn and was excommunicated by the Pope for doing so. But Henry had already passed legislation, the Succession Act of 1533, declaring his and Catherine's daughter, Mary, to be illegitimate, as well as his marriage to Anne Boleyn to be legitimate. In 1534, under the Act of Supremacy, Henry VIII declared himself to be the Supreme Head of the Church of England and severed all ties with Rome.

Shortly afterwards, in 1536, in order to strengthen his power and minimise his opposition, Henry started to destroy the wealth, power and influence of the monasteries, abbeys and convents in England, Wales and Ireland by confiscating lands, seizing and selling church property and taking over church revenues. Much of the wealth confiscated went into Henry's coffers. Abbots who opposed his measures were sentenced to death for treason. Fearing that fate for themselves, others donated their abbeys to the King. Rebellions followed in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire and Norfolk but were suppressed by Henry, with a mixture of false promises and executions.

By his actions, Henry VIII destroyed the manuscript wealth of England, as well as the system of charity, distribution of alms, and hospitals for the poor. Much of the land and property he seized was sold off to members of his new Tudor aristocracy, who increased the rents of their tenants and paid lower wages to their workers.

In Ireland, petitions were made to Henry not to sack the monasteries within the Pale, to no avail. When he made plans to send a Lord Deputy to Ireland, to ensure that Rome's power and authority over the Catholic Church was eradicated, he met with non-compliance from Lord Thomas Fitzgerald, son of the Earl of Kildare. Silken Thomas, as he was known, was Vice-Deputy of Ireland at the time. He condemned Henry's actions and organised a rebellion against him. Although the rebellion did not succeed, it showed that Henry could not fully rely on the support of the Anglo-Norman elite in the Pale to accomplish his plans for the reformed Church.

In 1536 the Irish parliament passed an Act establishing Henry as the supreme head of the Church in Ireland, with reform of Catholic dogma occurring only much later. As Henry was more concerned with usurping the power of the Pope in Ireland than with supplanting a new religious creed, only around half of the 140 targeted monasteries in Ireland were sacked, and only 40 per cent of the mendicant orders of friars were abolished.

The Reformation in Ireland was a 'top-down' movement, led by the King and his loyal aristocracy, unlike in most other countries in Europe where the masses forced reform from the 'bottom up'. Much of the population of England converted to Protestantism because they were loyal to the King, not because they were attracted to a new religion. But in Ireland the situation was very different: neither the Anglo-Norman 'old-English', nor the Irish Gaels, converted to Protestantism, but remained Catholic during Henry's reign.

In 1541 the Irish parliament passed the Crown of Ireland Act which granted, by his own directive, the title of 'King of Ireland' to Henry VIII and his successors. His authority in Ireland was now no longer in the historical gift of a Pope; he was now King by his own authority and could not be removed by Rome.

Surrender and Regrant

Henry's next plan of action was to deal with the Irish clans. Even within the nominally loyal ruling class of the Pale there had been support for the Roman Church, rejection of Henry's edicts and actions, and outright subversion. Many of the Anglo-Normans of the Pale responsible had been in Ireland for generations. As with their counterparts beyond the Pale, some had adopted Gaelic ways, or had sympathies with the native Irish. Outside the Pale, Henry had little support from the Gaelic clan Chieftains. His authority as King was limited to the counties of the Pale and could only be enforced in the rest of Gaelic Ireland with the consent of local clan leaders.

That being the case, Henry embarked on a mission to win the clans over. In 1536 he deposed the Fitzgeralds as Lords Deputy of Ireland and replaced them with Leonard Grey, 1st Viscount Grane who, as a military man, had accepted the surrender of Silken Thomas, Lord Thomas Fitzgerald, following his failed rebellion. But even Grey was not loyal to Henry. He was eventually found guilty of giving assistance to the insurgents, and was publicly executed in 1541.

In that year, Henry decided to admit Gaelic Irish Lords into both houses of the Irish parliament, and to recognise their land titles, in return for their submission to him as King

of Ireland. However his devious assault on the Irish Chieftains did not stop there. Irish existing land titles were governed by Irish Brehon Law, under principles of gavelkind and tanistry. Under those systems, the Chieftain of a clan held the clan's lands in trust for the kin-group until he or she died (under the rules of gavelkind); they were entitled to do this by virtue of their election as Chieftain (under the rules of tanistry). The clan lands were awarded, in trust, to the *Tanist*, who need not be the eldest son and whose right to the clan title would often be a matter of merit, based on physical contest.

Convinced that Ireland would never be fully brought under control as long as the Irish retained their own legal system, one at odds with the English one, Henry VIII determined to abolish the Brehon Law system of land inheritance and tenure and to impose English Common Law governance in its place. Under Henry's proposals, later named 'the surrender and regrant scheme', the clan Chieftain was encouraged to forfeit his or her title to the land concerned, in return for it being regranted to him or her by the King, in fee simple, under English Common Law, along with an English title of nobility.

Under these new rules, the first-born legitimate son would inherit the new Lord's estate, which could also be conveyed to others (i.e. alienated), in accordance with English Common Law rules. Ultimately, its ownership would vest in the Crown. Essentially, in return for English titles of nobility, the Chiefs relinquished to the King ultimate ownership of their lands, which had been held in trust for their people for thousands of years. Henry reasoned that the Irish Chieftains, now nobles appointed by an English monarch, whose lands were now also in the gift of the King, would be more likely to be compliant with his orders and commands.

This proved to be a shrewd strategy on Henry's part, and it eventually paved the way for the Plantation of the whole of Ireland, the confiscation of lands from Irish clans to English and Scottish Settlers, the replacement of Irish Brehon Law with English Common Law and, ultimately, the total destruction of the Gaelic way of life.

However, these disastrous events were only fully accomplished many years later, some of them under the reign of Henry VIII's daughter. For when Elizabeth I ascended the English throne in 1588, some 40 years after her Henry's death, she embarked on a far more aggressive policy in Ireland. She was determined to beat the Irish into submission, to confiscate their lands and to finish the job of Plantation started by her father. She set out to confiscate the land and other rich resources of Ireland, and destroy all of the things that

sustained the people of Ireland – such as their culture, language, dress, religion, laws, and music – once and for all.

It is time now to look at how this ambitious plan was accomplished, as examined through the lens of the life of one of Ireland's most renowned Chieftains, warriors and patriots, who at the beginning of his military career was loyal to the Queen, but who later changed sides, outplayed and outwitted Elizabeth's armies and won successive battles against them, before finally losing everything at the epoch-defining Battle of Kinsale in January 1602. Although he was forced to flee from Ireland a few years later, never to return, he remains one of Ireland's greatest and best loved heroes, and probably the one most feared and hated by the English. His name – Hugh O'Neill.

Chapter Two

Hugh O'Neill (1540-1616)

HUGH O'NEILL WAS a formidable Ulster Chieftain whose actions, during his exceptional life, led to fundamental changes in the course of Irish history. Born in 1540, son of Mathew O'Neill, the Earl of Dungannon, Hugh O'Neill came from a long line of Irish High Kings, dating back centuries. In the sixteenth century the O'Neill clan was one of the biggest and most powerful in Ireland, certainly the biggest and most powerful in Ulster.

During Hugh O'Neill's lifetime the English monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, had been determined to continue the colonisation efforts of her father, Henry VIII, by completing the Tudor conquest of Ireland. By the time of her death, in March 1603, she had achieved her life's goal. Unaware that she had died just a few days before, Hugh O'Neill, by then her arch enemy, surrendered to her Lord Deputy, Lord Mountjoy, in the aftermath of the defeat of his Irish and Spanish forces at the Battle of Kinsale.

O'Neill's is a fascinating, inspiring and, ultimately, tragic story. It culminates in the destruction of Gaelic Ireland and heralds a new era in Ireland's history, the Plantation of Ulster, under the long and dark shadow of which we, Irish and British alike, continue to live. But in his final campaign, O'Neill managed, for the first time in Irish history, to inspire, unite and lead most of Gaelic Ireland in a sustained war against England, in an effort to reclaim Ireland's sovereign independence and freedom of religious expression. Although England eventually won that war, O'Neill, albeit in defeat, had sown the seeds for a new Ireland, not the compliant and submissive one that Elizabeth had envisaged, but one based on a commonality of purpose – resistance to English oppression and occupation, with the ultimate goal being independence. O'Neill's ultimate legacy, which some might

dismiss as a failed and painful one, can equally be viewed as an inspiration, one that propelled the concept of Irish nationalism, the birth of the Irish nation and the start of an enduring battle for Irish freedom.

O'Neill's Gaelic lineage and early life

As already stated, O'Neill came from a prominent royal Irish line. His direct ancestors had been High Kings of Ireland, in an almost unbroken sequence since the fifth century AD. His immediate ancestors were his grandfather, Conn Bacach O'Neill, and his father, Mathew O'Neill. However, there were those who questioned Mathew's credentials as a son of Conn O'Neill, legitimate or otherwise, which led to bitter in-fighting in the O'Neill clan regarding succession rights, most of it readily exploited by the English.

At the time of Hugh O'Neill's birth, the clan territory extended throughout the modern county of Tyrone and included parts of the modern counties of Armagh and Donegal. The clan Chieftain at the time of Henry VIII, Hugh's grandfather Conn Bacach O'Neill, possessed the Gaelic title of King of Tyrone.

Conn had sided with his cousins, the Anglo-Irish Fitzgeralds, against Henry VIII in the failed Silken Thomas rebellion of 1537.[38] Following that defeat, and the invasion of his territory, Conn was forced to compromise to keep his O'Neill power base from being dismantled and destroyed. He travelled to Greenwich in 1542, submitted to Henry (who had by then decreed himself King of Ireland), proclaimed himself to be a Protestant, and became another victim of the 'surrender and regrant' policy.[39] In return for his submission, he was given the English title Earl of Tyrone for his lifetime, became a Privy Councillor and was granted lands in the Pale,[40] along with a sum of money and a golden chain. His son Mathew was given the title Baron of Dungannon and was nominated as his father's heir, despite his dubious claim to be his father's *Tániste* under Brehon Law.

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[38] See previous Chapter.

[39] The 'surrender and regrant' scheme was devised by Henry VIII as a means of controlling, and eventually usurping, the power of the Gaelic Chieftains in Ireland, through their land titles. Lands were held under Brehon Law by the clan Chieftain in trust for the clan members dependent on him or her. Henry convinced, or coerced, individual Chieftains to hand over the Brehon Law title of their land to the Crown, in return for benefits such as titles of nobility, financial support and assistance with hostilities against opposing clans. The land title would be restored to them in their own name, in fee simple, and legalised under English Common Law by letters patent. The land could then be sold or bequeathed to anyone the Chieftain desired, or could pass to the first-born son, rather than to an elected *Tániste*. In effect the system was used by Henry VIII, and his daughter Elizabeth I, to undermine Brehon Law, to increase bitterness and hostility among rival clans and, in due course, to have the land concerned revert to Crown ownership under English Common Law.

[40] The Pale was an area around Dublin inhabited by those totally loyal to the monarchy.

Conn's submission to the English Crown was treated with hostility by many O'Neills, most notably by his son Shane, who demanded that the succession and title pass to him, and not to Mathew, in accordance with English Common Law. But the strategy of the English administration was to support the weaker claim of Mathew, thus preventing the stronger Shane from gaining too much control, and at the same time keeping them both in check by making them distrustful rivals of each other.

In 1558 Mathew was murdered by agents of Shane. Following Conn's death the following year, an Act of the English parliament gave Shane O'Neill the English title of Lord O'Neill until such time as his claim for his father's estate was settled. The writ for Shane to be named the second Earl of Tyrone was written up, but was delayed in Dublin. Shane rebelled, but he was killed before he could be invested. In 1569, the retrospective writ banned the use of the Gaelic traditional title of *Ó Neill Mór* (The Great O'Neill).

The English were in no hurry to settle the internal feuding surrounding the succession within the O'Neill clan. In the meantime, following the killing of Mathew, a new powerful figure emerged, Turlough Luineach O'Neill, the son of Conn's uncle, Niall Connallach O'Neill. Turlough, defying the English ban, assumed the Gaelic title of *Ó Neill Mór*, which he held until 1593.

Initially, Turlough was in military contention with Shane's sons (the MacShanes), but he eventually made peace with them and granted them lands in return for their loyalty. He then turned his attention to a new rival, his cousin Hugh O'Neill, who had inherited his father Mathew's title, Baron of Dungannon. As ever, the English supported the underdog, in this case Hugh O'Neill, ensuring that, for another generation, tension and distrust between these two O'Neill factions curtailed the power and ambitions of each other.[41] However, in 1593, two years before his death, Turlough resigned his leadership of the O'Neill clan and passed on the position to his *Tániste,* Hugh.

Unusually, there were no other rivals to challenge the position that Hugh O'Neill now held. Hugh's chieftainship was marked, initially, by his acceptance and support for English rule in Ireland but was later followed by a recurring pattern of transgressions, followed by submissions, pardons and reinstatements. This system suited the English, but O'Neill became an expert in in exploiting it for his own purposes. In his final years as clan Chieftain, O'Neill would rise to the point where he would mastermind and lead a united

[41] This successful 'divide and rule' tactic of the English was a mainstay of their colonial strategy down through the centuries.

Irish rebellion against Elizabeth's forces in Ireland, a rebellion that would shake the English State to its foundations, that would cost it thousands of deaths and millions of pounds and that would come very close to ending English control of Ireland entirely.

When Hugh O'Neill's father, Mathew, was murdered by Shane O'Neill, Hugh was just eight years old. Being now vulnerable to assassination himself, and with no faction of the O'Neills willing to take responsibility for him, Hugh became a Ward of the English Court, under the patronage of Giles Hovenden, an English settler in the Pale. Probably in recognition of the likelihood that this young O'Neill could one day grow to become the future leader of the most powerful clan in Ireland, it was decided that he should be brought to England.[42] There, for the next nine years, O'Neill developed close ties with his English benefactors and became thoroughly inculcated in English speech, fashions, education, society and values, in the manner of an English nobleman.

In 1567, after the death of Shane O'Neill, Hugh was brought back to Ulster, under the protection of the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Sir Henry Sidney. He inherited the title Baron of Dungannon from his brother Brian (who had been assassinated on Shane's orders).

O'Neill's education in Irish affairs now began in earnest, entirely self-taught. Assuming a leadership role, and steering a path through *"a myriad of confusing interconnections concerning the birth, fosterage, marital and other relationships of his enemies and friends"*, he soon realised that *"the colonists, however much they hated this maze of alliances and family entanglements, were able to find their way through [it] . . . and that from three hundred miles away"*.[43]

O'Neill's primary aim at that time, and for years to come, was to increase his personal power and authority within the O'Neill clan. He figured that to achieve that aim he first had to prove himself a trusted and loyal servant of the Queen. With this in mind, he successfully fought on her behalf to repress the Irish clans involved in the Desmond Rebellions in Munster, from 1569–1574 and from 1579–1584. It must have seemed to the English that theirs had been a wise and far-sighted move. What better way to undermine the Gaelic system than to have one its future leaders brought up in, and loyal to, your own side?

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[42] Some historians claim he did not go to the English Court, but rather was brought up in the English-dominated Pale.

[43] S Ó Fáolain, *The Great O'Neill: A Biography of Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone, 1550-1616* (Cork, 1992), p. 52.

The First Desmond Rebellion (1569-1574)

The main reason behind the first Desmond Rebellion was an internal conflict within the Fitzgerald dynasty, i.e. between the rival houses of the Butler Fitzgeralds of Ormonde in Leinster, and the Desmond Fitzgeralds (or Geraldines) of south Munster. It will be remembered that the Fitzgeralds were one of the original Norman families to invade Ireland during the twelfth century and that, having proven themselves to be trustworthy and loyal to Henry II, they were left to govern Ireland on his behalf as Lord Deputies. But they fell out of favour after one of their number, Lord Thomas Fitzgerald (Silken Thomas), son of the Earl of Kildare, and Vice Deputy of Ireland, unsuccessfully led a rising against Henry VIII. Like many Norman Irish over the centuries, the Fitzgeralds had adopted Irish ways, Irish language and Irish sympathies. By the time of Elizabeth I's reign, they had their own regional armies and were operating under their own mixture of English and Brehon Law, quite independently of official English Common Law.

Elizabeth planned to regain control over those same powerful, independent, Norman Irish Lordships by supplanting their sources of wealth and power and installing, in their place, local military governors (Lord Presidents), who would be directly controlled by the Crown. In 1567, when the Butlers and the Desmond Fitzgeralds, in defiance of English law, engaged in armed conflict against each other, in an attempt to protect their respective power bases, they were summoned to the English Court to be dealt with by Elizabeth. Favouring Butler, the Earl of Ormonde, with whom she had been friends in her childhood, Elizabeth pardoned him but subjected Gerald Fitzgerald, Earl of Desmond, and his brother John, to arrest and detention in the Tower of London.

General James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald, who became the new leader of the Desmond Fitzgeralds after Gerald's detention, sought to re-establish the armies of the Norman Irish Lords by attacking the Earl of Ormonde and the English presence in Ireland. He gained support from other land-owning Irish Chieftains in Desmond territories, including McCarthy Mór, O'Sullivan Beare and O'Keeffe, who feared their lands were about to be confiscated. A devout Catholic, Fitzmaurice also had the support of the Archbishop of Cashel, who was seeking military support from King Phillip II of Spain on his behalf.

Fitzmaurice attacked Cork in 1569 and went on to besiege Kilkenny, seat of Ormonde power. But he was defeated by English forces, aided by Butler and some Irish clans opposed to the Geraldines. Into this conflict Hugh O'Neill became enthusiastically embroiled, on the English side, supporting his benefactor Sir Phillip Sidney, son of the

Lord Deputy, against the Desmonds. As Seán Ó Fáolain puts it, they *"raced through the land, burning villages, blowing up castles, hanging every man [they] caught alive, flinging down their corpses from the battlements to terrify others".*[44] Among the casualties were around seven hundred Scottish mercenaries who had come to support Fitzmaurice. They were captured and executed.

By 1571, most of the Irish clan leaders had submitted to the English, and a new Lord President of Munster, John Perrot, had been installed. Fitzmaurice himself submitted in 1573. Although his life was spared, all of his lands were confiscated. He was forced to flee to Catholic France from where he sought military help for another uprising. Meanwhile, as a reward for his loyalty to the Crown, the Earl of Ormonde became the most powerful Lord in the south of Ireland.

After the Rebellion, the Earl of Desmond, Gerald Fitzgerald, along with his brother John, were released from captivity in London and allowed to return to their castle at Askeaton, near Limerick. Most of their lands were restored, but they were forbidden to keep more than twenty horsemen and their tenants had to pay them in rent, rather than in military support as before. Tighter laws against Gaelic law, dress, language and culture were also imposed. The sons of Gaelic Chieftains were to be educated in England. When they returned to Ireland, they would be expected to practice and teach the English language and the Protestant religion.

At first, the Earl was inclined to accept this settlement, but many of his followers, and those who were financially and otherwise dependent on the Gaelic system, were not. In addition, many Chieftains feared the confiscation of their own lands by new English settlers, and religious intolerance against Catholics was also to the fore.

The Second Desmond Rebellion (1579-1584)

Pope Pius V had excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570, declared that her lands were forfeited, that she had no right to rule and that her subjects had no obligation to obey her. The papacy had supported the first Desmond Rebellion leaders' revolt in 1569 and agreed that Elizabeth should be deposed and replaced by her cousin, the Stuart Mary Queen of Scots.

[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

In 1579, James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald returned to Ireland from France, with Spanish and Italian soldiers. In 1580, Pope Gregory XIII suspended the previous proclamation against Elizabeth, in order to alleviate persecution against Catholics in England.

Fitzmaurice immediately proclaimed a Holy War against the English Queen. He was joined by the Earl of Desmond's brother John, who wasted no time in attacking and killing prominent English officials and enlisting the help of various important Munster clans. A few months later, the size of Fitzmaurice's army had risen to two thousand, a considerable number, however Fitzmaurice himself was killed early on in the conflict.

Soon the Earl of Desmond decided to join their forces, after changing his allegiance when he was betrayed by the English, to whom he had pledged his son as security for his own loyalty. Disregarding their promises, the English attacked his people and cattle and razed his crops and buildings. Desmond retaliated by seizing the town of Youghal and sacking it. Other towns suffered the same fate at the hands of the rebels.

Desmond implored other Gaelic Lords to join the fight to defend the Catholic faith and free Ireland from English rule. But many Lords joined the side that they thought best protected their own interests, or reflected their antipathy towards the Geraldines, rather than for reasons of religious freedom or Irish sovereignty. As had happened in the first rebellion, the Butlers of Ormonde supported the English cause.

The English response, when it came, was predictably ferocious. They attacked castles that had been taken by the Geraldines and hung all the Spanish and Italian troops there, resulting in those controlling nearby castles to surrender in fear. They murdered soldiers and civilians alike, including, according to the *Annals of the Four Masters*, *"blind and feeble men, women, boys and girls, sick persons, idiots and old people"*.[45] Then they attacked and killed everyone on Fitzgerald lands, burned all their crops and seized all their cattle.

As historian John Dorney claims, *"[i]t is difficult to conclude other than that the English introduced a new level of brutality into sixteenth-century Irish warfare with the wholesale killing of civilians and use of unrestricted scorched earth warfare"*.[46]

Opposing the English, the Geraldine forces had been aided by Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne from Wicklow, and Lord Viscount Baltinglass from the Pale, who attacked the newly

[45] J O'Donovan (trans.), *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616, 7 vols, (Dublin, 1856).*
[46] J Dorney, *The Desmond Rebellions Part II, the Second Rebellion, 1579-83*, The Irish Story (Irish History Online, 2015).

appointed Lord Deputy Grey at Glenmalure. Once more, Hugh O'Neill fought on the English side, as in 1584 when he fought with Sir John Perrot against the Highland Scots of Ulster, earning praise from the Deputy for being the first Irish Lord to spill blood. His actions were also singled out for praise by the English chronicler Moryson in this way: "*on all occasions he behaved himself valiantly*".[47]

After the death of Fitzmaurice, Pope Gregory XIII again used his power and influence to assist the Irish. While King Philip II of Spain was reluctant to launch an expedition to Ireland in his own name, he did agree to provide troops and transport. Around eight hundred men, in the pay of the Pope, landed at Smerwick Harbour near Dingle in September 1580. With insufficient help from Geraldine Lords, they were besieged at Dún an Óir, by land and sea forces on the English side. They held out for several weeks but, following a fierce English artillery attack, they finally surrendered. All of the survivors, some six hundred soldiers, along with their priests and other civilians who had surrendered their weapons and submitted to the English, were, despite previous promises of mercy, mercilessly slain. Many of their dead bodies were strung up and used for target practice. Elizabeth later extended her personal gratitude to the English soldiers for their actions on that day.

Elsewhere, Irish civilians and soldiers alike were suffering badly from disease, famine and killings. Most of the land, including crops, had been destroyed by fire. Cattle were confiscated. Soon nothing and nobody was to be seen in the whole of Munster. In 1581, the rebellion in Leinster collapsed, with its leaders fleeing to France. Chieftains in Munster petitioned for pardons, which were granted generally to all, except to the leaders of the Geraldines.

The war continued for a few more years, until 1584. The final outcome was disastrous for the population of Munster. Edmund Spenser, the English poet and Adventurer, who had himself fought in the war on the English side, described the state of devastation of the land as a result of the English scorched earth policy (of which he totally approved) in this way:

"*. . . in those late wars in Munster; for notwithstanding that the same was a most rich and plentiful country, full of corn and cattle, that you would have thought they could have been able to stand long, yet ere one year and a half they were brought to such wretchedness, as that any stony heart would have rued the same*".

[47] S Ó Fáolain, *op. cit.,* p. 53.

The now landless, sick, and starving Irish people were graphically described in this way:

"Out of every corner of the wood and glens they came creeping forth upon their hands, for their legs could not bear them; they looked Anatomies [of] death, they spoke like ghosts, crying out of their graves; they did eat of the carrions, happy where they could find them, yea, and one another soon after, in so much as the very carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves; and if they found a plot of water-cresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the time, yet not able long to continue therewithal; that in a short space there were none almost left, and a most populous and plentiful country suddenly left void of man or beast; yet sure in all that warre, there perished not many by the sword, but all by the extremitie of famine, which they themselves had wrought".[48]

The *Annals of the Four Masters* recorded the end of the rebellion in this way:

". . . the whole tract of country from Waterford to Lothra, and from Cnamhchoill to the county of Kilkenny, was suffered to remain one surface of weeds and waste. At this period it was commonly said that the lowing of a cow or the whistle of the ploughboy could scarcely be heard from Dun-Caoin to Cashel in Munster".[49]

The enduring outcome of the Desmond Rebellions was that the power of the southern Geraldines was broken forever. Any of their allies remaining were forced to flee to Kerry, where they were given small parcels of land by *McCarthy Mór*.[50] The Fitzgerald lands, and those of their allies, were given to English soldiers and Adventurers, in what became known as the Munster Plantation.

With Leinster mainly loyal to the Queen, and Connacht unable to put up sustained resistance, Hugh O'Neill must have realised that, despite his loyalty to Elizabeth up until

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[48] E Spenser, *A View of the State of Ireland* (first published in manuscript form, 1598). The above description was an ominous precursor of another tragic event in Irish colonial history, when Irish subjects of another English Queen, Victoria, suffered starvation, sickness and death during the Great Hunger some three hundred years later.

[49] J O'Donovan (trans.), *op. cit.*

[50] This writer has a personal connection with this rebellion. My late husband's ancestor Maurice Sheehan was, according to oral family history, the right-hand man of the Earl of Desmond. Maurice Sheehan's personal and clan lands, in Lower Connello, extended to half of modern County Limerick. All of it was confiscated following the defeat of Desmond's forces. When Sheehan fled, after the Earl's murder in Kerry by a member of the Moriarty clan, McCarthy Mór provided him with a small-holding refuge on the border of Cork and Kerry, in modern day Sliabh Luachra, where my late husband, Donal Ó Síodhacháin, was born nearly four hundred years later. Historical documents which have recently come to light have confirmed this oral family history. See D Ó Síodhacháin, *Formative Influences on the Life of DD Sheehan: A Reassessment*, MA Thesis in History of the Family, University of Limerick, 2013.

that point, it was inevitable that the English would now turn their attention to Ulster, and to his lands, and so complete the English conquest of Ireland. If he did, he was right.

The Nine Years War

When O'Neill recognised that his own position in Ulster was now precarious, he did not act rashly. Rather, he took his time in preparing his new plans, covertly recruiting, training and arming his followers, and securing alliances within both Gaelic Ireland and the Old English in the Pale. He led a double life, still outwardly appearing to be the Queen's loyal subject but, simultaneously, secretly plotting treason against her.[51] His own previous ambitious plans, to increase his personal wealth, power and influence, became more important than ever, but were now harnessed for the better good of ridding Ireland of English rule.

Over the next few years, he set about increasing his land holdings and wealth, claiming new titles and powers in Tyrone, eliminating his enemies there and, in 1593, succeeding in becoming *Tániste* to his old adversary, Turlough Luineach O'Neill. When Turlough died in 1595, Hugh O'Neill was conferred at the O'Neill's traditional coronation site, Tullyhogue, with the title he most coveted: *Ó Neill Mór*, The Great O'Neill, Chieftain of the O'Neill clan in Tyrone and the most powerful Gaelic Chieftain in Ireland. His conferring also endowed him with the Gaelic title of Prince of Ulster.

If, at that stage, the English had been in any doubt as to O'Neill's loyalties, they now knew where he stood and that he was ready and willing to rise against them. The following is an outline of the events leading up to the ensuing Nine Years War, of that conflict itself, and of its immediate aftermath.[52]

Young Hugh O'Donnell Captured

One of O'Neill's main strategies involved building up alliances among the Gaelic Irish in Ulster and the Old English in the Pale. In Ulster, the most important potential alliance to be forged was between himself and his erstwhile ancient enemy in Tyr Connell,[53] The O'Donnell. There were strong marital ties between the two clans, with O'Donnell's daughter Siobhán becoming the second wife of Hugh O'Neill (1574). Thirteen years later, in 1587, O'Neill betrothed his daughter, Rose, to O'Donnell's heir, young Red Hugh

[51] In time he was to be described by the English as an *'arch-traitor'* and *'the Queen's worst enemy'*.
[52] This account relies heavily on the work of J Mitchel's, *The Life and Times of Aodh O'Neill, Prince of Ulster* (New York, 1868).
[53] Modern day County Donegal.

O'Donnell. This was a good tactic by O'Neill, but it horrified the English, seeing as their chief policy in Ireland was 'divide and conquer'. They greatly feared any alliance between the two main Ulster clans, and so came up with a plan to abduct and imprison Red Hugh to prevent the marriage. Young Hugh was duped onto an English trading ship anchored at Rathmullan, invited to sample the ship's cargo of fine Spanish wines until, in a state of intoxication, he was brought under sail to Dublin, where for several years he was imprisoned in the Castle, in the most horrific conditions.

It must be remembered that, at that time, O'Neill was not ready to show his hand to the English, and so could not openly attempt a rescue of the young O'Donnell. Red Hugh, only fifteen years of age when he was captured, made two escape attempts over the next few years, the first unsuccessful. O'Neill had to be patient and bide his time because, as we will see, his new plans included having Red Hugh at his side.

The Composition of Connacht

Following the suppression of the Desmond Rebellions, the English successfully utilised the same subjection tactics they had introduced in Munster to southern and northern Connacht, and had even encroached into Sligo and Tyr Connell. This policy, named the 'Composition', involved the introduction of Reforming Agents, or Sheriffs. In opposing this policy, the Mac William Burkes in northern Connacht had brought over one thousand Scottish gallowglass mercenaries to assist them, but to no avail. All were killed in a battle against English troops led by Sir Richard Bingham, the Governor of Connacht, at Ardnaree in 1586.

Attacks on Southern Ulster

The subjection of Connacht completed, the Deputy, Fitzwilliam, then set his sights on southern Ulster, which he planned to govern by the imposition of a Provincial President under Sir Henry Bagenal. Sample Compositions took place in Longford, Cavan and Monaghan (Mac Mahon's country). In 1591, Mac Mahon's Lordship was 'reformed' by splitting it up into eight smaller areas and dividing it among his clansmen. Mac Mahon himself was hanged. Similar 'solutions' took place in Longford in O'Ruarc territory, and in Breifne (Cavan/Leitrim) in O'Reilly's territory. O'Ruarc was also hanged, while O'Reilly fled into exile.

Hugh O'Neill was well aware of the threat the policy of Composition would mean to his own position. The introduction of a Sheriff into his country would end his control over

Tyrone, reduce his land holding and eliminate any chance of expanding it. It would also reduce his income and thereby reduce his ability to raise and feed an army. It was obvious that he must now fight for his very survival.

Enemy in the Camp

In the early 1590s, several significant events occurred. In 1590, O'Neill had been betrayed by one of his own clansmen, Hugh Gaveloch O'Neill (whom he later hanged), son of Shane O'Neill. Hugh Gaveloch had informed the English in the Pale that O'Neill was a traitor and that, at his castle in Dungannon, he had been entertaining and plotting treason with some of the Spanish soldiers who had been shipwrecked off the Irish coast following the failed Spanish Armada against England in 1588. O'Neill had indeed been doing just that, forging links with Spain and making known to the Spanish king the extent of the religious persecution in Ireland by the English, as well as the extent of the Irish hatred for the English and his own earnest entreaties and plans for Spanish assistance.[54]

Instead of going to Dublin, to where he had been summoned to defend himself, O'Neill travelled, without permission, directly to the English Court, where he pledged abject loyalty to the Queen and agreed to sign up to numerous faithful commitments, and copious restraints on his activities, from then on. She allowed him to return to Ireland to deliver these solemn pledges in person to the Lord Deputy. On returning home, O'Neill claimed he wanted the other Gaelic Lords to join him in pledging to the Deputy. None did and, in the end, neither did he.

While in London, O'Neill availed of the opportunity to purchase a variety of rich furnishings for his castle at Dungannon, including a quantity of lead for the roof. We are told that the new roofing lead was secretly used to make ammunition for his expanding, secret army.

Then, in August 1591, O'Neill eloped with, and secretly married, his third wife, Mabel Bagenal, sister of the Queen's Army Marshal, Sir Henry Bagenal, and daughter of the previous Marshal, Sir Nicholas Bagenal. While never a friend, Henry Bagenal now became O'Neill's deadliest enemy.

[54] In contrast to O'Neill's treatment of the Spanish shipwrecked, old Hugh O'Donnell, being under the control of the English, attacked a wrecked ship, killed many on board and sent the rest as prisoners to the Deputy.

O'Donnell's Escape

In January of the following year, on his second attempt, along with two sons of Shane O'Neill, Henry and Art, Red Hugh O'Donnell escaped from Dublin Castle, with the help of one of the O'Hagan clan (a foster-brother to Hugh O'Neill). He managed to make his way south to Wicklow in the midst of a bitterly cold winter blizzard. Exhausted, starving, meagrely clothed against the harsh conditions, and unable to progress further over the mountainous terrain, Art and Red Hugh lay down to rest. Henry O'Neill had already left them to go his own way, leaving O'Hagan to carry on alone to seek help. He eventually returned with Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne's men, allies of Hugh O'Neill. Red Hugh's companion lay dead from exposure, but young O'Donnell was brought to safety and shortly thereafter transported to Hugh O'Neill's country. His feet had been so badly damaged by frostbite that two of his toes had to be amputated.

O'Neill was delighted at news of the escape (which, it is well accepted, he had secretly organised) and took great care of O'Donnell for several months. They became staunch allies. The older man set to work educating his young protégé in his own ambitions and plans for ridding Ulster of the English. Red Hugh, still young and impulsive, and naturally impatient to avenge his capture and imprisonment by his English enemies, took some time to fully appreciate O'Neill's strategy of patience and subterfuge. But he persevered. Together they secretly started to assemble a confederacy of Ulster Chieftains. In addition, in 1593, the O'Donnell clan assembled at the Rock of Doune at Kilmacrennan, Tyr Connell, where the old Chieftain passed the O'Donnell chieftainship to his son, Red Hugh.

O'Neill's Covert Tactics

When O'Neill's men attacked the ever-encroaching English army, he claimed to the English that he had no control over them and so could not be held responsible. He even distanced himself from knowledge of, and association with, the attacks made by Red Hugh and other Ulster leaders on English outposts in Ulster, such as the one by Mac Gwire on his southern border (in present day County Fermanagh). On one occasion he even attacked Mac Gwire, when called upon by the English to help oppose him, despite Mac Gwire being a trusted ally.

In 1594, a major confrontation took place between O'Neill's Confederacy and the English troops at the Battle of the Ford of the Biscuits in Fermanagh. The Irish had been besieging Enniskillen Castle for months, following the ambush and defeat of a force of English

soldiers by Hugh Mac Gwire and Cormac MacBarron O'Neill (Hugh O'Neill's brother). In August, the English sent a column of soldiers to relieve and resupply the Castle, but the Irish killed over fifty of them and wounded many more.[55]

In the following year of 1595, two significant battles were fought: one of these occurred at the English garrison at Blackwater Fort. Art MacBarron O'Neill led the attack against the English forces when he and his soldiers assailed and captured the fort at Blackwater Town, on the border of the modern counties of Tyrone and Armagh. This fort had been erected twenty years previously as an English outpost in O'Neill's territory. O'Neill himself took part in the attack, his first in open opposition to the English.

The second battle of that year, at Clontibret, took place against O'Neill's old adversary Sir Henry Bagenal in what is now County Monaghan. A column of English troops, led by Bagenal, on its way to relieve soldiers besieged by the Irish at Monaghan Castle, was attacked by Hugh O'Neill, and suffered heavy losses.

The English were shocked by this defeat and by the strength and organisation of the Irish forces. The Irish army was much bigger than that of Bagenal, who was surprised by how well armed and well trained the Irish soldiers were, unaware that O'Neill had been recruiting and equipping an army of followers, quietly and surreptitiously, between 1586 and 1594.

The Lord Deputy Russell wrote to Elizabeth: *"Their arms and weapons, their skill and practice therein far exceeded their wonted usage, having not only great force of pikes and muskets, but also many trained and experienced leaders as appeared by the manner of coming to the fight and their orderly carriage therein"*.[56]

The Deputy implored the Queen to give him the resources to deal with this superior, and ever-expanding, army. More and more attacks were being made by Gaelic fighters against English forts on the borders of Tyrone. O'Neill was strongly suspected of having organised them, but no confirmed sighting of him had yet emerged.

That same year, O'Neill was finally inaugurated as *Ó Neill Mór*, The Great O'Neill, a title and leadership position that he accepted from his clan. To the English he was now no

[55] The battle got its name from the English supplies (of hard biscuits) which fell into the River Arney.
[56] J O'Neill, *The Irish Military Revolution, 1593-1603*, in E Campbell, E Fitzpatrick and A Horning (eds.), *Becoming and Belonging in Ireland c. 1200-1600: Essays in Identity and Cultural Practice* (Cork, 2018), p. 300.

more than a traitor, but to his own people he was their leader, their champion and their Chieftain.

English Delaying Tactics

The Deputy, Russell, not having enough men to take on O'Neill's and O'Donnell's armies, decided to play for time by sending for Commissioners to try and negotiate with the rebel leaders. Sir Henry Wallop and Sir Richard Gardiner summoned O'Neill, as Earl of Tyrone, and the other Earls, to attend at Dundalk as English subjects to discuss their 'grievances'. But O'Neill, in reply, responded with a new haughtiness:

"*[He] refused to see these commissioners, save at the head of his army, or to enter any walled town as a liege man of the Queen of England; 'For be it known unto thee, O Wallop, that the Prince of Ulster, on his own soil, does homage to no foreign monarch: and as for your 'Earls of Tyrone' - Earl me no Earls; my foot is on my native heath, and my name The O'Neill*".[57]

The English conceded and they met in the open, in front of both armies. O'Neill demanded no garrisons or Sheriffs to be sent to Ulster (save where they were already, in Newry and Carrigfergus); no attempt at religious 'reformation'; Bagenal to be restrained from entering any Irish territory; and Bagenal to be compelled to pay the dowry for his sister Mabel to O'Neill (one thousand pounds of silver).

O'Donnell, who had successfully led his army into Connacht, had killed Sir Richard Bingham's soldiers in Sligo, Ballymoate, Tulsk, Boyle and further afield, and had burned and pillaged as he went, also attended the conference. He had brought many Chieftains into the Confederacy and had reinstated Mac William to his lands. As with O'Neill, he demanded: no garrisons, no Sheriffs and freedom of religion. He also complained about his abduction and imprisonment, and the attempts by traitorous kinsmen to usurp his chieftaincy by means of English Common Law.

The Commissioners pretended that they would consider these demands and consult with the Queen. They proposed, in the meantime that the Irish should lay down their arms, seek forgiveness and disclose their correspondence with foreign States, all of which proposals were rejected. A short truce was agreed before the meeting broke up.

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[57] J Mitchel, *op. cit.,* p. 110. Mitchel acknowledges that those words may not have been the actual words of O'Neill but they were *"to that effect"*.

O'Neill Victories

O'Neill continued to secure alliances, arm and train ever more troops, and encouraged the Irish of Leinster to attack the Pale. Many clan leaders (the O'Tooles, O'Connors, O'Byrnes, O'Mores, Cavanaghs and Butlers), led by Owen More and Fiach O'Byrne, were attacking the English there, demanding use of their Irish names and the restoration of their lands. The English fought back, attacking a fort in the Glens of Wicklow and killing O'Byrne. O'Neill sent soldiers to assist O'Byrne's sons and together they won back the glens and mountains.

At the end of the truce, O'Neill attacked the English in Armagh. Their commander, Norryes, fled to Dundalk, leaving five hundred men to defend Armagh itself. O'Neill decided to attack it by siege. When Norryes sent supplies, O'Neill captured the convoy and dressed his soldiers in the English uniforms. He feigned an attack on these 'relieving' soldiers by his own men, in sight of the garrison in the town. They, not seeing the subterfuge, rushed out to help their own and were set upon by both sides. When they realised the trap, they tried to get back into the city but were barred by more of O'Neill's forces hiding nearby. It was O'Neill's victory. He sacked the castle.

Later that year the Commissioners decided to try the Irish Lords by jury, in their absence. Unsurprisingly, they were all found guilty. They (O'Neill, O'Donnell, O'Ruarc, Mac Gwire and Mac Mahon) were officially denounced as traitors.

In 1597, Russell was recalled to London and replaced by Lord Deputy De Burgh. Most of Ulster was now under the control of the Irish, apart from the castles at Carrickfergus, Armagh, Newry, Carlingford, Dundalk, Greencastle and Olderfleet (Larne). De Burgh, a seasoned soldier, was under orders from the Queen to pursue a vigorous war and make no peace treaties. After a short truce to allow preparations, hostilities began.

The English planned a pincer movement, coming in from Meath via Mullingar; from Newry and Armagh; and from western Lough Erne. O'Neill sent Richard Tyrrell from Meath, a trusted officer, to keep watch on the Meath soldiers. The English discovered Tyrrell's position and decided to deal with him before proceeding. But Tyrrell had led them into a trap. The English were caught front and rear and eliminated.[58]

Sir Conyers Clifford was leading the English army from Connacht into Bundoran, and on to Portmore, to join the Ulster forces there. On the way he came face to face with two

[58] The area is, to this day, known as Tyrrell's Pass.

thousands of Hugh O'Donnell's men. Outnumbered, Clifford retreated to Connacht. O'Donnell then raced to meet up with O'Neill for a new battle.

On the banks of the Blackwater, O'Neill engaged in more subterfuge, tricked the Lord Deputy de Burgh into an area of his choosing, and killed him, along with a great many of his troops and best soldiers, including the Earl of Kildare, his two foster brothers and Sir Francis Vaughan, the Deputy's brother-in-law. This became known as the Battle of Drumfluich. The English retreated to Dundalk and on to the Pale, leaving the garrison at Portmore unprotected.

O'Neill Offered a 'Gracious Pardon'

In 1598, the Earl of Ormonde became Lord Lieutenant in charge of the Queen's forces. He was ordered to seek peace with O'Neill. An eight-week truce was agreed in the meantime. They met at Dundalk to agree terms: O'Neill's demands were for freedom of religion throughout Ireland; compensation for the destruction caused to the Irish by English garrisons; and for Irish Chieftains to have total control over their own territories and people.

The terms were to be sent to Elizabeth. Pending the outcome, O'Neill was ordered not to engage in discussions with Spain; to restrain his troops during the truce; to assure safe passage to English officers going to and from their castles; and to permit the Portmore Fort to receive supplies. In return, no Irish troops were to be molested by the English and free passage was guaranteed for the Irish travelling to the Pale.

At the end of the truce Elizabeth gave Ormonde liberty to offer O'Neill a 'gracious pardon', dependent on his complying with her demands, which included disbanding the Confederacy; disbanding his forces; sending all foreigners out of his country; repairing bridges; renouncing his Irish title and all powers relating to it; admitting a Sheriff; paying a fine; handing over all traitors (i.e. those professing Catholic religion, or willing to fight against English); releasing his correspondence with Spain; releasing Shane O'Neill's two sons held in hostage; and giving his own son as hostage security for his obeying these demands.

O'Neill dismissed all of the said demands and rejected the pardon. Entertaining this process had simply been to give him more time to secure Spanish help. In April 1597, a Spanish ship had arrived in Killybegs. O'Neill met those in charge and held discussions. He discovered that, in Europe, the English had been spreading false reports about O'Neill

and his Irish forces, claiming military failures, abject submissions and such like. O'Neill assured the visitors that the opposite was the case and brought them up to date with events in Ulster and beyond. He pressed upon them the need for Spanish help to finally rid Ireland of the English and return the country to the Catholic faith. He also offered to give the Spanish suzerainty in Ireland.[59]

This offer would have been of great advantage to Spain, as a means of keeping the English army occupied in Ireland, and so preventing them from offering a strong opposition to the Anglo-Spanish war (the conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism in the Spanish Netherlands from 1585 to 1604). If the war in Ireland turned out to be successful, the Spanish would have a say in the future English succession after Elizabeth died.

Meanwhile O'Neill had no choice but to continue with the war, relying solely on Irish forces. Between his own men, and the men O'Donnell could call on, their army totalled 5,380 foot soldiers and 1,260 horsemen. Additional forces swelled these numbers to 7,220 foot and 1,702 horse.

He sent word to O'Byrne to attack the Pale, as he (O'Neill) intended to keep Ormonde's army engaged in the north. He also sent assistance to O'More who was besieging the castle in Portlaoise. He himself intended to try and destroy Portmore Fort once and for all. Unable to take it by force, he besieged it for several weeks and secured passages between Armagh and Newry. At the same time Sir Henry Bagenal was leading a huge army marching north. He relieved the passages between Newry and Armagh, then turned his attention to Portmore, where the besieged army was on its last legs.

The Battle of The Yellow Ford

In August 1598, O'Neill summoned O'Donnell and Mac William, determined that together they would stop Bagenal before he reached Portmore. The two armies were fairly evenly matched (apart from English artillery and their superior protective battle-gear). On O'Neill's side there were 4,500 foot and 600 horse; on Bagenal's, 4,500 foot and 500 horse. *"And small as these forces appear, they were the two largest armies, Irish against English, that had met upon this soil since Strongbow's invasion."*[60]

O'Donnell took up position about a mile from Portmore, on the road to Armagh, through which the English troops would have to traverse a narrow pass, with on one side a bog,

[59] This arrangement would leave the Irish in control of their own internal affairs, with Spain being in control of their foreign affairs.
[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

and on the other a thick wood. To get through, the army would have to penetrate the woods through very rough terrain and discoloured streams coming from the bogs. The place was called the Mouth of the Yellow Ford.[61]

On the morning of the battle, Bagenal's army left Armagh in three sections; one division was surreptitiously attacked by O'Neill's men as they made their way through hilly and wooden pathways, killing great numbers of them. But Bagenal nevertheless led his men through, amid heavy fighting, dislodging the Irish and forcing them onto the plain. The two other divisions pushed on. Having cleared the difficult terrain, they formed up against O'Neill in the open, flat ground.

Bagenal stormed the Irish positions, but O'Neill had dug trenches, into which he had planted sharp spikes covered with foliage. Advancing English foot soldiers and horses perished as they fell into the pits. Other English soldiers started to attack the Irish with artillery, forcing them to retreat. Then the main body of O'Neill's army was brought into play. O'Neill sought out Bagenal but to no avail; he had already been shot in the brain. His division was soon forced to retreat and was routed. A cart carrying gunpowder exploded in the English ranks, killing many of them. Then the cavalry of both sides took to the field. The English were faltering against a better enemy.

"At last the whole of that fine army was utterly routed, and fled pell-mell towards Armagh, with the Irish hanging fiercely on their rear . . . and as O'Donnell's chronicler has it, they were 'pursued in couples, in threes, in scores, in thirties, and in hundreds', and so cut down in detail by their avenging pursuers".[62]

English losses were put at 2,500, including 23 superior officers. The Confederates had suffered only 200 deaths and 600 wounded. Fifteen hundred English sought refuge in Armagh. After three days they surrendered, were disarmed and were allowed by O'Neill a safe passage to the Pale. Those based at Portmore also surrendered and were given similar treatment. The dead on both sides were buried by O'Neill and O'Donnell. Together, with the help of the Confederacy, they had rid Ulster of the English army.[63]

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[61] One of O'Donnell's poets, Fearfasa O'Clery, on learning the name, recalled that St Bercan had prophesised a battle to be fought at such a place, with victory to the Irish.

[62] *Ibid*., p. 143.

[63] O'Neill's treatment of the surrendering, and deceased, English soldiers at the Battle of the Yellow Ford stands in stark contrast to the treatment meted out by the English to the surrendering foreign soldiers at Dún an Óir in 1580.

Ireland Rejoices

The Confederates' victory was met with widespread rejoicing across all of Ireland. 'Old English' Lords, professors of the Catholic faith, but normally loyal to Elizabeth, now joined the Confederacy. In Leinster, the Queen's troops were expelled by O'Cavanagh, O'Byrne and O'More as the English, under Ormonde, confined themselves to their forts in fear.

In Munster, hope rose again after the destruction of the Geraldine Rebellions, while the 'New English' Planters started to fear for their safety. After calls for assistance from Pierce Lacy of Limerick, O'Neill sent troops, led by Richard Tyrrell, to liberate the south, where they were shortly joined by The Knight of Glin, The White Knight, Fitzmaurice Baron of Lixnaw, The Knight of Kerry, Desmond and Donagh McCarty, The O'Donoghue, Roche, Viscount Fermoy, Thomas Butler Baron of Cahir (a kinsman of Earl of Ormonde), Richard Lord Mountgarrett (married to O'Neill's daughter), the O'Sullivans, the O'Driscolls, the O'Donovans and the O'Mahonys of Carbery.

English settlers were ejected from the lands they had taken and had their castles and houses burned. They were permitted to flee to the cities. The English poet Edmund Spenser, now Sheriff of Cork, who had recently finished his *View of the State of Ireland* and *The Faërie Queene* (in honour of Elizabeth), was summarily relieved of his Bailiff duties, and of his land and property at Kilcolman. He left Ireland as poor as when he first arrived twenty years earlier and is said to have died of starvation in London the following year.

The Geraldines retook their confiscated land. O'Neill appointed a new Earl of Desmond by Irish tenure – a Count Palatine of Desmond. Although the Earl's son had been prisoner in the Tower of London for 17 years, O'Neill appointed the Earl's nephew, James, son of Thomas the Red. He *"was duly invested . . . with the dignity, estates and ancient privileges of the Earl of Desmond; stipulating to hold the same as a vassal and tributary to the Prince of Ulster"*.[64]

John Mitchel sums up the state of play of the war at this point:

"Hugh O'Neill who was now the recognised leader, the head and heart of our national Confederacy, and directed its operations everywhere throughout the land, saw foreign power totally prostrated in Ireland, its military resources annihilated or defeated, its Irish adherents either crushed or, what was better, brought over to the cause of patriotism and honour: but still he omitted no means of strengthening the league: he renewed his intercourse with Spain, planted permanent bodies of troops on the Foyle, Erne and Blackwater, engaged the services of some additional Scots from the

[64] *Ibid.*, p. 150.

Western Isles, improved the discipline of his own troops, and on every side made preparation to renew the conflict with his powerful enemy. For he well knew that Elizabeth was not the monarch to quit her deadly grip of this fair island without a more terrible struggle than had yet been endured".[65]

English Retaliation

Elizabeth was furious at the outcome in Ireland – especially with Ormonde, who had stayed behind in Leinster and had sent Marshal Bagenal to do his work for him. Ireland was now a major problem that she had to deal with. In the meantime, she sent two thousand troops under Sir Samuel Bagenal. Then, in April 1599, Robert Devereaux, son of the late first Earl of Essex, became the new Lord Lieutenant and Commander-In-Chief of the improved, much larger English army of up to twenty thousand men. His orders were to ignore the lesser Chieftains and head straight for the Confederacy leaders. He was to station strong troops at Lough Foyle and Ballyshannon, restricting O'Neill's access to the Scots and to Connacht, before tackling O'Neill himself in Tyrone. But Ireland *"had never been so strong, so proud or so united"*,[66] with strong defences at Lough Foyle, Dundalk, Lough Erne, Connacht, Munster and Leinster. As a bonus to the Irish, a ship arrived from Spain with enough arms for two thousand men, which O'Donnell divided between his own and O'Neill's armies.

Lord Lieutenant Essex

Essex strayed from his orders, making petty strikes into Munster and Leinster instead of heading for the north. He travelled south to besiege Cahir Castle, but was set upon by O'More's men in ambush, and suffered many casualties. Still, he proceeded to Cahir where, after ten days of bombardment by cannon, he took it from Desmond and Redmond Burke. Lord Cahir and Lord Roche submitted. He advanced to Limerick where he fought the Geraldines and the McCarthys, with Norryes, now Lord President of Munster, dying in the battle. The English army was defeated and forced to retreat to Dublin in shame, followed for six days by the victorious Irish. There, Essex learned of the routing by the Irish of six hundred of the men he had stationed on the border of O'Byrne's territory. Essex blamed the officers of misconduct, Court-marshalled them and *"with the ferocious cruelty that belongs to a coward, decimated the surviving soldiers"*.[67]

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[65] *Ibid.*, p. 150.
[66] *Ibid.*, p. 150.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

Essex then wrote to Elizabeth, saying the Irish were stronger and better armed than the English and that different tactics must be used against them, such as hunting down priests, breaking up their unity and ruining the military power of the Chieftains. Only then should the policy of imposing Sheriffs and establishing English law be continued with. His plan was to sack the north, guard the coasts and impose garrisons (none of which he ever did).

Elizabeth was not impressed; she ordered Essex to attack O'Neill. But he diverted his attention again, this time towards some Leinster insurgents, and then demanded one thousand additional troops to compensate for his losses. When these were dispatched, he finally set out to deal with O'Neill.

He ordered Sir Conyers Clifford to cause a diversion in Belleek and planned his entry into Ulster through Newry and Dundalk. But again, he changed his plans. With the summer nearly gone, he wrote to Elizabeth that no more could be done that year, except to draw his forces close to Ulster. It seems obvious that he had no stomach for facing O'Neill and was prevaricating. Sir Conyers Clifford set about with his orders, but was over-powered by O'Donnell and O'Ruarc, who were waiting for him. Clifford was killed, as were many of his men. The rest were driven back to Boyle Abbey, with the Irish chasing them for three miles. They subsequently withdrew completely into their garrison.

In September 1599, O'Neill invited Essex to negotiate. They met at the ford of Ballaclinch near Dundalk, O'Neill on horseback in the middle of the stream, Essex on the bank opposite. O'Neill, charming his opponent with courtesy and good manners and, exploiting the fact that he, O'Neill, had been good friends with Essex's father, the first Earl of Essex, devised a new plan. He was well able to read Essex and his shallowness, and soon got him to open up to reveal his personal desires. It is said that he managed to capitalise on Essex's arrogance and ambition and to implant the idea that he should rise against the Queen and, having done so, he assured him of O'Neill's support and of that of the King of Spain. Then, others joined on each side and the parley proper began. O'Neill repeated his demands regarding religion and the return of confiscated lands, to which Essex replied that he thought those were reasonable and he would use his good offices with the Queen to see that they were obtained, on the basis of a peace settlement. A 6-week truce was agreed, with fourteen days' notice by either side of resumption of hostilities.

The Queen, on hearing this, sent a letter to Essex rebuking him in the harshest terms, which he took to heart. He abandoned his position and responsibilities to Archbishop Loftus and

Sir George Carew and returned to the English Court as soon as he could, to present himself abjectly to Elizabeth, who had uncovered his plot to rise against her. As Mitchel informs us,

"How he was received at Greenwich; how the virago Queen ordered him into instant arrest; how she stormed and swore at his presumption in daring to quit his post in Ireland without leave asked, what treasons were alleged against him, and how it fared with him thereafter: all this belongs to English history, not to Irish".[68]

Back in Ireland, O'Neill was again in touch with Spain. King Philip II had recently died, and his successor, his 20-year-old son Philip III, seemed more inclined to get involved in O'Neill's religious war. He sent two envoys, along with promises of papal indulgences for those who would fight the English heresy in Ireland. He also sent twenty-two pieces of gold for O'Neill's personal use.

After the 6-week truce had ended, O'Neill served 14-days' notice of his intention to resume hostilities. He marched south throughout Ireland to make a pilgrimage at Holy Cross. He was now not only an Irish Chieftain but also, as he announced to the other assembled Chieftains, the Pope's Champion and Accredited Defender of the Catholic Faith. Those he felt, or knew, were not with him, he deemed to be against him and they were dealt with severely.

The Arrival of Lord Mountjoy

In 1600, Lord Mountjoy, an experienced soldier, arrived in Dublin as the new Lord Deputy of Ireland. Having received instructions to install garrisons at Derry and Ballyshannon, he had been well provided with additional troops to carry out this demand. No expense was now being spared by Elizabeth to destroy O'Neill, despite crippling sums already incurred, with little to show for the extraordinary expense. With Mountjoy came George Carew, the new President of Munster, who had also been provided with soldiers by Elizabeth, and Arthur Chichester, the new President of Ulster. In May 1600, a fleet of armed ships left England for Carrigfergus, commanded by Sir Henry Dowcra, with 67 ships, 4,000 foot and 200 horse. They also brought with them engineering supplies and craftsmen.

To divert O'Donnell's and O'Neill's attention from the Foyle at that time, Mountjoy's army marched north to Newry. O'Neill defended the pass at Moyry against a much greater

[68] *Ibid.*, p. 168.

force, but eventually had to retire. With reinforcements, O'Neill and O'Donnell secured every pass north of Newry, but Mountjoy returned to the Pale, reckoning that Dowcra had by then reached his destination. Before leaving, he placed strong garrisons at Newry, Carlingford and Dundalk.

Meanwhile Dowcra landed at Culmore, on the Foyle, and disembarked his vast army, totally overwhelming the O'Doghertys of Inishowen and the O'Cahans of Arachty. As most of their armies were with O'Neill and O'Donnell further south, they could offer little or no resistance. Dowcra built a fort at Aileach and captured the hill of Derry. Then he started to build a town at the hill and to fortify it. He destroyed existing houses and took the wood for building, as well as cutting down trees in O'Cahan's land for the same purpose.

O'Neill and O'Donnell soon arrived, with five thousand men, to attack this new development. But Dowcra refused to leave his base to engage. The Irish had no option but to retire. Dowcra remained there for the whole of the winter, securing his fort and refusing to fight the enemy without.

Elizabeth's New Plan

Elizabeth now concocted a plan to 'divide and conquer' the Irish army, by weakening the laws against Catholic worship, thus driving a wedge between the Old English and the Gaels, and even among the Gaels themselves. Mitchel explains how different plans were needed in Ulster:

"This policy . . . could hardly operate in the North where the war was national, not religious; and where Reformation and persecution were still unknown. For the North, therefore, another artifice was used: the ambition of certain members of ruling families was excited by certain offers of English support, if they would revolt against their chiefs and aspire to the leadership of their respective septs; and, accordingly, in the course of this summer arose three pretenders to northern chieftaincies.

"Niall O'Donnell, surnamed Garbh the Rugged, one of the ablest leaders of Clan-Conal, whose name was distinguished in the Thomond expedition, basely sold himself to the enemy; and upon pretence of some injustice done him by The O'Donnell, entered into communication with Dowcra, gained over many of the clansmen to his side, revolted against his lawful Prince, and received an English garrison into the castle at Lifford. In Tyrone, Art, son of Turlough Luineach, . . . who probably still held his father's castle of Strabane, became, by favour of Queen Elizabeth, Sir Arthur O'Neill; and encouraged by the near neighbourhood of an English army, dared to claim the

chieftaincy of his sept. Both these traitors became close allies of Sir Henry Dowcra, and by their assistance he was soon enabled to push his operations somewhat farther up the river. He built the fort of Dun-na-long, six miles from Derry, and stationed eight hundred men there, while the rebellious Irish were wasting and plundering the country of their kinsmen on both sides of the Foyle. On the southern frontier of Ulster, also, Connor Roe Mac Gwire, having been in like manner tampered with by the Deputy, took up arms against his country in the character of 'Queen's Mac Gwire' ".[69]

In Munster, Carew was using the same 'divide and conquer' tactic, turning a commander of fourteen hundred mercenaries, Dermot O'Connor, against James, the Earl of Desmond, by offering rewards for the Earl's capture. In the end it was The White Knight, a Geraldine kinsman, who delivered the Earl to Carew, receiving one thousand pounds as a reward. The Earl later died in the Tower of London. Carew's conniving and deceit succeeded in stirring up distrust and hostilities among other clans in Munster. The new McCarthy Mór, Florence McCarthy, at the instigation of his wife, also became involved in deals with Carew, and was eventually sent to the Tower, falsely accused of high treason, along with the Earl of Desmond. In his endeavours to set the Gaelic clans against each other in Munster, Carew was supported by the Anglo-Irish Lords Clanrickarde, Thomond, Barry and others.

Although O'Neill had his own problems in Ulster, he became aware that the Confederacy in Munster was breaking up, mainly because the unifying factor of religious persecution had been slackened. Many castles, including Askeaton, Glin, Carrig-a-foyle, Ardart, Liscaghan and Loughgwire had been sacked, their cattle driven off and houses burned. By December *"there was not one castle in all Munster held against the Queen".*[70]

In Leinster, Mountjoy was enjoying similar success, having killed O'More of Leix and razed thousands of pounds worth of corn crops. O'Donnell and O'Neill now realised that the war with this new Deputy was being waged in a new and alarming way*:*

". . . fraud, perfidy and assassination were to take the place of open battle; the chink of gold was to be heard instead of clashing steel; and the swords of these false Saxons were to be turned into sickles, to prostrate the unripe grain, and so too was against women and children as well as fighting men. But the northern chiefs had still a gallant army at their backs, and were yet able to keep the English garrisons imprisoned within their walls and moats. They were in daily expectation of succour from

[69] *Ibid.,* pp. 182-183.
[70] *Ibid.,* p. 191.

King Philip, and hoped full soon to cut asunder the meshes of this traitor policy with their good swords".[71]

O'Donnell and O'Neill Battle On

O'Donnell was preoccupied with events in and around Tyr Connell – the forts at Derry, Culmore, Dun-na-long and Lifford and the problem of Niall Garbh O'Donnell. He defeated Dowcra in a skirmish near Derry. Leaving some of his men to keep watch, he rode quickly south to deal with the ongoing treachery of the Earl of Thomond. There he learned that, back in Inishowen, the clan Chieftain O'Dogherty was dead, that many of the clan had decided to support Dowcra and that the English intended to impose a pretender to the chieftaincy. Meanwhile, Niall Garbh O'Donnell, with English help, had taken over the Franciscan monastery of Donegal, ousted the friars and fortified it. Red Hugh rode to the monastery and laid siege to it for 3 months, until it was finally destroyed by fire, killing hundreds of English troops as well as Niall Garbh's men.

O'Neill was determined to guard the southern approaches to Ulster, via Armagh and Dundalk, just as forcefully as Mountjoy was determined to penetrate them. In September, along with almost 3,000 soldiers, Mountjoy made another attempt to breach the Moyry Pass fortifications. O'Neill defended it as before, but after heavy fighting Mountjoy broke through. He flattened the woods and cleared the difficult terrain, before building a fort to protect the pass and open up the way for the English army. He named the fort Mount Norris. Retiring to Newry, and then to the Pale for the winter, Mountjoy placed a bounty of two thousand pounds on O'Neill's head if captured alive, and half that if brought in dead.

Before Mountjoy left Ulster, O'Neill's army attacked his again. Mountjoy and several other important English officers were gravely wounded; but they managed to proceed to Dublin, leaving Portmore, Armagh and the country north of Newry in the hands of the Irish.

English Advances in Ulster

In the spring of 1601, Mountjoy returned to Moyry, led his army through the pass there, took some neighbouring outposts and returned to Newry. He then ordered Sir Henry Danvers to launch an all-out attack on Armagh and secure it for the English. O'Neill was ready and prevented his passage, but Danvers was soon joined by Mountjoy and together they beat O'Neill into retreat along the river Blackwater. Mountjoy moved his troops to

[71] *Ibid.,* p. 192.

Armagh, stationed Danvers with eight hundred and fifty soldiers there and returned to Newry. Soon afterwards, he came back to Portmore and repaired the dismantled fort. He then stationed additional soldiers there.

Mountjoy now had troops stationed at forts in Newry, Lecale (Down), Carrickfergus, Mount Norris, Armagh and Portmore. This was in addition to Dowcra's fortifications at Derry. Those ten thousand English troops were all well-armed, including with artillery, and supplied with plentiful provisions to withstand attacks from O'Neill and O'Donnell's forces. Mountjoy next cleared all the rough terrain between Newry and the Blackwater, so allowing easy access to his army. O'Neill fought hard to disrupt these activities, but he was outnumbered and outmanoeuvred. Still, he did not give up. He continued to believe that reinforcements from Spain would arrive very soon. There had been ongoing negotiations between the Spanish on the one hand, and O'Neill and O'Donnell on the other, for some months. The Catholic Archbishop of Dublin had visited them in Ulster and had then travelled to Spain to help speed up the embarkation of Spanish ships, where preparations were under way.

Spanish Ships in Kinsale

The English were also aware of these developments. In September 1601, it was no surprise to them when word came that a Spanish fleet had anchored in the harbour at Kinsale. Mountjoy immediately made arrangements for most of his northern troops to head to Munster. Demands for urgent reinforcements were sent to England.

The Spanish fleet was small, both in number and size of ships. It had suffered severe losses from a storm, so that only 3,400 soldiers landed at Kinsale, many of whom had no experience of war. O'Neill later considered them inadequate for the purpose he had envisioned. The general in charge, Don Juan D'Aguila, had a poor record of fighting and leadership. He sent letters to O'Neill and O'Donnell when he disembarked, asking for their presence straight away, then billeted his troops in the town of Kinsale, took possession of the forts at the entrance to the harbour and waited for Irish reinforcements. He soon found out that very little support was to be had from the Munster Lords, whether Anglo-Irish or Gaelic, as nearly all of them had submitted to the President. As Mitchel says, they had either been *". . . corrupted by English gold, or intimidated, or disgusted by the treachery of their allies, or imprisoned in the dungeons of London. In truth, O'Neill's noble effort*

to make a nation out of the miserable materials which Munster afforded him to work with, was a total failure".[72]

O'Sullivan Beare, O'Connor Kerry and O'Driscoll were the only Irish Lords to openly declare for Philip of Spain and Gaelic Ireland.

English Reinforcements Arrive

Mountjoy was sent 3,100 new troops from England, along with ten new warships with another 2,000 soldiers on board. Additionally, he raised many more soldiers in Ireland, by forcing the towns of Munster to supply their quotas of men for the Queen. They were also supported by troops from Lords Clanrickarde and Thomond. By November, the combined number of the soldiers at Mountjoy's disposal was 15,000.

Gaelic Ireland Assembles

Meanwhile, word had also reached Ulster that the Spanish had landed at Kinsale. All conflict now ceased, on both sides, while preparations were made to engage battle at Kinsale. O'Donnell commanded his own clan, as well as the O'Ruarcs, the Mac Sweeneys, the O'Doghertys, the O'Boyles, the Mac Donoughs, the Mac Dermots, the O'Connors, the O'Kellys and more, amounting to 2,500 men. O'Neill commanded the Mac Donnells of Antrim, the Mac Gennises and the Mac Artanes from Down, as well as his own clan, in total 3,000 – 4,000 men.

O'Neill and O'Donnell headed south, arranging to rendezvous at Holy Cross in Ormonde country. O'Donnell arrived first, only to learn of an imminent attack by Carew's men. Unwilling to engage at this time, O'Donnell sought to make a forced march over the mountains towards Limerick. But the ground, being wet and soggy, made passage for horses and carriages impossible. The President, Carew, thinking that he had O'Donnell trapped, assumed he would be forced to fight when daylight dawned. But when a heavy frost fell that night, O'Donnell gathered his army and made a stealthy forced march over the mountain, the hard ground now allowing his passage. By morning he was twenty miles away. Carew's efforts to further disrupt his passage before he reached Kinsale were equally ineffective.

O'Donnell then marched on Muskerry in west Cork to raise the clans there. When he arrived in Castlehaven he met up with seven hundred Spaniards, who had just survived

[72] *Ibid.,* p. 204.

an attack by the English fleet and were ready to join Don Juan D'Aguila in Kinsale. Heartened by these arrivals, the O'Driscolls gave their support to the Irish. O'Sullivan Beare fortified his castle, Dunboy, at Bearehaven.

Carew and Mountjoy were by now besieging Kinsale, where D'Aguila's men had been reduced to seeking the protection of the town's walls. Formidable bombardment of the walls took place for several days, but Don Juan refused to surrender. Then, on 19 December, O'Neill's and O'Donnell's joint armies could be seen in the distance. They had been joined by Tyrrell, who had forced marched his army through Leinster and Ormonde country and had finally met up with O'Donnell, and the newly arrived Spaniards, at Bandon.

The Battle of Kinsale

Now O'Neill assessed the situation in Kinsale. He witnessed the Spaniards being bombarded by a mighty force, both by sea and by land. With a much smaller army than Mountjoy's, he decided not to engage in battle at that point. His first action would be to cut off Mountjoy's supply links. The English army, as was so often the case, was being diminished by disease and desertion, especially by Irishmen. O'Neill was counting on these factors, as well as continual skirmishing and the worsening weather, to provide him with an opportunity to wear down, and so overcome, the English.

The events of the pre-dawn of 24 December 1601 are somewhat confused.[73] The English appeared to notice flashing lights in O'Neill's camp, signalling, as they thought, that his soldiers were preparing their weapons for an engagement. The English prepared for the attack by advancing towards O'Neill, who was not, in fact, on the move and was taken by surprise. O'Neill's foot soldiers quietly and slowly retreated for about a mile to a position which gave them some protection, but they were attacked by Marshal Wingfield, Clanrickarde and others. Eventually the Irish fled in confusion. Another section of O'Neill's men, led by Tyrrell, maintained position on a hill. Seeing their comrades retreating in confusion, they too retreated, although in a more disciplined way. O'Neill and O'Donnell prevented the retreat becoming a total rout, with few losses, while the Spaniards who had met up with O'Donnell at Castlehaven refused to budge and suffered

[73] In English State Papers the Battle of Kinsale was recorded as having taken place on 24-25 December 1601. According to Irish and Spanish records, which followed the Gregorian calendar, it took place on 3-4 January 1602.

severe losses. Their commander, Del Campo, along with two officers and forty soldiers, was taken prisoner.

It was a major blow for O'Neill. He had been unprepared, had seen his plans disrupted and had suffered the loss of his camp, as well as most of his arms and supplies, to the English. Reluctantly, left with no other choice, he retreated to the north to wait for better weather and replenished resources. This meant abandoning the Spanish, still under siege in Kinsale, to their fate. A few days later Don Juan came to a capitulation agreement with Mountjoy, surrendered all the castles under his control, and was allowed to return to Spain with all of his equipment and arms.

Kinsale Lost

It is fair to say that Don Juan was severely critical of O'Neill and O'Donnell, but also fair to say that the feeling was mutual. He had landed in Cork, not Ulster, as directed. Neither had he landed with the stipulated force of men required for a Munster attack, and he had failed to appreciate the effort and commitment it took for the northern men to march so far south. But his disdain for the Munster Irish, who fought with the English, was probably well deserved.

A possible reason for the confusion regarding what happened on the night in question is the allegation that one of O'Neill's trusted officers, Brian Mac Hugh Oge Mac Mahon, had, on the preceding day, sent a communication to Carew, warning him to be on his guard the following night, and giving details of a pre-dawn, two-fronted attack on the English position by the Spaniards and the Irish. The reason for the warning was, apparently, that Mac Mahon's son had been brought up in Carew's household as a page. However, the events themselves do not corroborate this account.

O'Donnell Sails to Spain

O'Neill prepared for the long march north, but O'Donnell decided to board a Spanish ship, with the intention of going to King Philip to inform him personally of the Irish dissatisfaction with the aid that had been sent and asking for better and more. He was well received when he landed in Caruña, travelled on to Galicia and Santiago de Compostela, and from there to Zamora, the Court of Philip.

"With passionate zeal he pleaded his country's cause; entreated that a greater fleet and stronger army might be sent to Ireland without delay, unless his Catholic Majesty desired to see his ancient

Milesian[74] *kinsmen and allies utterly destroyed and trodden into the earth by the tyrant Elizabeth; and, above all, whatever was to be done he prayed it might be done instantly, while O'Neill still held his army on foot, his banner flying; while it was not yet too late to rescue poor Erin from the deadly fangs of those dogs of England."*[75]

King Philip III listened with sympathy to Red Hugh's plea. He ordered troops (6,000 men) and supplies to be made ready to sail on 20 March, to assist Don Juan del Aguila if he was still in Kinsale, and to assist O'Donnell to return to Ireland, along with a supply of money. When the surrender at Kinsale became known, the king increased the number of troops to 14,000 men, along with sixty-seven ships. In the meantime, help in the form of arms and money was to be sent to Ireland, along with Irish officers serving in the Flanders army.

O'Donnell had asked for a smaller force, of a few thousand, to be sent to Ireland before the larger one could be made ready, but the king was reluctant to endure another humiliating defeat. The original timetable was extended. By June, the fleet was still not ready to sail. By July it was realised that it would not be feasible to launch it before the autumn bad weather and that the venture would have to be postponed until the following year. O'Donnell was given permission to speak again to the King in person.

On 10 August 1602, O'Donnell arrived at the King's Court in Simancas. However, he unexpectedly died there one month later from an unknown illness, now commonly suspected to have been the result of being poisoned by an English agent, James Blake.

O'Donnell, aged just 29 years, was given a funeral fit for a Prince, *"in a four-wheeled hearse with great numbers of State officers of the Council and of the royal guard all round it, with blazing torches and bright flambeaux of beautiful waxlights blazing all round on each side"*.[76] He was buried in the Franciscan church in Valladolid. His death was the cause of great grief among the Irish in Spain and in Ireland.

King Philip sent letters to O'Neill expressing his sorrow and ordered money and arms to be sent to Ireland. But once again, this order was not complied with until many months had passed.

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[74] A reference to the belief that the Irish race descended from Milesius (see Chapter 1).
[75] *Ibid.,* p. 214.
[76] D Murphy, SJ (ed.), *Beatha Aodha Ruaidh Uí Dhomhnaill* (Dublin, 1895), p. cxlix., cited in M Kerney Walsh, *Destruction by Peace: Hugh O Neill After Kinsale (*Armagh, 2015), p. 23.

Munster Destroyed Again

In Munster, Mountjoy spent the spring of 1602 making sure all remnants of the Irish insurrection were quashed. Richard Tyrell remained active, while Sullivan Beare retook his castle at Dunboy from the Spaniards (who had intended to give it up the English). The castle was an important fortress, commanding as it did Bantry Bay, and Carew was determined to take it. Against a relentless artillery attack on the walls of the castle, with besieging troops numbering four thousand men, O'Sullivan Beare held out for fifteen days until the walls were breached. Despite the strong defence, Carew's men prevailed, killing almost one hundred and fifty Irish.

O'Sullivan Beare and Tyrrell fought on, inspired by letters from O'Neill and the hope of renewed help from Spain. But when news came of O'Donnell's death, O'Sullivan Beare fled Munster, with his family and retinue of four hundred, and set out for Ulster to meet up with O'Neill. They finally found safety in Breifne (Cavan/Leitrim), his retinue numbering only forty.[77] Back in Munster, Carew and his men continued their campaign of taking castles, hanging priests, destroying crops and land, and reducing that land once more to *"ashes, blood and smoking ruins"*.[78]

Mountjoy Attacks Ulster

In June 1602, Mountjoy reached Ulster, where he commenced building bridges, reclaiming forts and crossing rivers. Then he headed for Dungannon. O'Neill had burned down his own castle and retreated to the nearby forests and mountains, where he still managed to hold a safe camp, and from where he communicated with clan Chieftains throughout Ireland, despite being hemmed in by Dowcra and Niall Garbh O'Donnell on the west and north-west; by Mountjoy's men on the south; and on the north (in Antrim) by Chichester.

Mountjoy's reports back to Elizabeth made excuses for O'Neill, who had a price on his head, still being alive. He continued to build forts and communication networks and encircled O'Neill even more, on the west and south. An all-out, co-ordinated assault to capture O'Neill was planned.

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[77] A description of their flight, through hostile territory, has been set out in several publications, including a reprint of Aodh de Blacam's original account (published in the Capuchin Annals) in D Ó Síodhacháin (ed.), *Beara to Breifne, The Story of the 1600 Irish Wars, The Fall of the South and the Great Fighting Retreat of Donal Ó Sullivan Beare* (Cork, 2003).

[78] J Mitchel, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

Meanwhile, O'Neill still evaded capture, but was making overtures of peace to Mountjoy, despite the Queen's instructions that no peace negotiations with him should be entertained. At the same time, O'Neill wrote to King Philip asking that, if the promised help could not arrive before the first of May 1603, a ship be sent to allow him and his few remaining allies to flee Ireland and escape with their lives.

At the height of summer, Mountjoy laid waste to all of O'Neill's country, razing crops, slaughtering cattle and burning houses. By the end of August, he had reached Tullyhogue, the O'Neill clan's coronation site, and destroyed that too. O'Neill, at Castle-Roe, found himself ever retreating. He made a last stand with six hundred foot and sixty horse, an engagement that lasted through the winter. His hopes were still high for Spanish help.

O'Neill Concedes Defeat

O'Neill still had allies in Connacht, but his supporters had been reduced to O'Ruarc, Mac Gwire and Tyrrell. He now knew Red Hugh had died and that help from Spain would not be forthcoming. Thousands of his people lay dead or were starving. As Mitchell puts it,

"At last the haughty Chieftain learned the bitter lesson of adversity: the very materials of resistance had vanished from the face of the earth, and he humbled his proud heart, and sent proposals of his accommodation to Mountjoy. The Deputy received his instructions from London . . . the negotiation was hurried, on the Deputy's part, by private information which he had received of the Queen's death; and fearing that O'Neill's views might be altered by that circumstance, he immediately desired the Commissioners to close the agreement and invite O'Neill, under safe conduct, to Drogheda, to have it ratified without delay".[79]

O'Neill met Mountjoy at Mellifont in March 1603 and surrendered to him on bended knee. O'Neill may have conceded, but he had not given up. Later that year he travelled to London with Red Hugh's brother, Ruairí O'Donnell (soon to take over the O'Donnell clan leadership), to pledge obedience to James I,[80] Elizabeth's successor. Secretly he wrote to Philip in Spain proclaiming their allegiance to him, with promises to rise up against the new King of England if the current peace negotiations between Spain and England collapsed.

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[79] *Ibid*., p. 225.

[80] King James I of England was a Stuart, the son of Mary Queen of Scots. He was also King James VI of Scotland.

But in August 1604, a peace Treaty between Spain and England was signed, which contained a condition that neither monarch would give support or help to insurgents of the other's territories (i.e. no English help would be given by King James to those opposing Spanish rule in the Low Countries; and no Spanish help would be given by King Philip to those opposing English rule in Ireland).

King James had restored much of their former lands to O'Neill and to Ruairi O'Donnell, the newly appointed Earl of Tyr Connell. But the English administration in Ireland had other ideas. Few believed that O'Neill had truly conceded defeat, and thought it was more likely that he feigned his submission, as he had done so many times before, and was playing for time to renew hostilities. They worked assiduously and systematically to strip the Earls of their lands, their income and the supporting laws and customs upon which Gaelic society in Ulster still operated.

By July 1605, the King had issued a proclamation denying religious independence to Catholics in Ireland, forcing them to attend Protestant services and banishing all Catholic priests from the land. These prohibitions applied equally to Old English Catholics in the Pale, many of whom had fought against O'Neill. They secretly contacted O'Neill, assuring him of their loyalty, and willingness to fight against England, if and when Spanish aid arrived.

Ruairí O'Donnell travelled clandestinely to visit the Spanish ambassador in London, to ask him to inform Philip that, if the peace Treaty between Spain and England was unlikely to last, they (the Earls and their League of Irish Catholics) would wait for up to two years for the renewal of hostilities against England, during which they would act under Philip's orders. However, if Philip believed that the peace would last, they asked that he send a ship for them to be taken to safety, because they now, more than ever, feared for their lives. They also asked for financial assistance.

Philip replied that he thought the peace would last and that the Treaty meant that he could not intercede with King James on behalf of the Irish. However, he did agree to send financial help. In 1605, Philip appointed Hugh O'Neill's son, Henry O'Neill, as colonel of a new Irish Regiment (also to become known as the Regiment of Tyrone) in the King's service in Flanders, so commencing a tradition whereby six successive Earls of Tyrone would serve as colonels. Many Irishmen, fleeing Ireland after Kinsale, would be given employment in that regiment. Despite indications to the contrary, the peace with England was holding.

The English Attack O'Neill with New Weapons

Meanwhile, O'Neill had attracted a formidable enemy, the English lawyer Sir John Davies (appointed Solicitor General in 1603 and Attorney-General in 1606). He considered the Irish to be uncivilised barbarians. Obsessed with 'civilising' them, he became bent on ridding the country of the Brehon Laws, and replacing them with English Common Law throughout the land. He resented that fact that although O'Neill had been defeated, he still held the respect of the people and retained much of his land territory and income.

In December 1605, O'Neill was forced to write to King James, informing the King that his officers in Ireland were undermining his hereditary fishing rights on the River Bann and at Lough Foyle, and were increasingly refusing to recognise what O'Neill considered to be the rights conferred on him by the King under his letters patent. He urged the King to clarify these rights before all of his property was confiscated.

Receiving no reply, O'Neill and O'Donnell wrote to King Philip, informing him of their predicament arising from their loss of land rights and severe loss of income. They warned him that they would have to flee to Philip for the protection of their lives, unless he sent the promised financial help.

While the Spanish were considering this request, O'Neill again wrote to King James, in June 1606, outlining some of the disastrous attacks on his rights that the alleged uncertainties in his letters patent were producing. In September 1606, the English Privy Council wrote to the then Lord Deputy in Ireland, Sir Arthur Chichester, instructing him to leave the Earl legally unmolested, for so long as he remained faithful to His Majesty. But Chichester, long an enemy of O'Neill's (whose brother had been killed by him), was intent on adding some of O'Neill's lands to those he had already acquired for himself. He had no intention of going easy on O'Neill.

Additionally, Davies, the lawyer, spotted (or invented) what he considered to be ambiguities in O'Neill's letters patent from the King, and claimed that O'Neill's so-called hereditary rights were in fact unlawful usurpations. He also alleged that much of O'Neill's land had been vested in the Crown in Elizabeth's reign, and remained so, despite O'Neill's letters patent. A campaign of attrition against O'Neill was commenced in London, in the hope of turning King James against him by falsely accusing him of no longer being obedient to the State. O'Neill wrote to the King again, assuring him that he had not breached martial authority, and asking that his accusers be brought before the King to justify their accusations. No more came of it, but the King's suspicions had been aroused,

as they had, also, by Court advisers preying on his fears of revolt, insurrection and threats to his life (such as the one recently masterminded by Guy Fawkes).

In Ireland, O'Neill's troubles were exacerbated by the age-old tactic of 'divide and conquer', when his former loyal ally and son-in-law, O'Cahan, offered his services to Chichester and Davies. He wanted his lands, which were then combined with O'Neill's under Brehon Law ownership-in-trust, to be detached and registered in his sole name under English Common Law. Chichester and Davies encouraged him in his endeavours. In addition, the new Bishop of Derry was seeking the return to the Church (i.e. to himself) of what he claimed were Church lands, then in O'Neill's estates. He cited, as a precedent, the legal extraction and restoration of lands to O'Dogherty from the estates of Ruairí O'Donnell.

"It was now no longer merely a dispute between O'Neill and O'Cahan; the case had become a trial of strength between the Earl and the ministers of King James."[81] The upshot was that King James ordered a trial of the case to take place before him in London, in a few weeks' time, with Davies in attendance as his legal adviser.

The Flight of the Earls

"It would appear that by then O'Neill's enemies had succeeded so well against him that, on arrival in London, he would have been accused of treason, committed to the Tower and executed, for such was the warning O'Neill and O'Donnell declared they had received from 'intimate friends of theirs on the King's very Council' ".[82]

After many years of being forced to consider, and reject, this ultimate option, preparations were now reluctantly put in hand for O'Neill, O'Donnell and their retinues to flee Ireland and to board a ship to take them to Spain. By September 1607, the plans were ready. On 6 September, O'Neill had a meeting with Chichester at Slane, at which they discussed O'Neill's plans to attend the Court in London. O'Neill stayed at Mellifont until 9 September, then travelled through Dundalk, Silverbridge, Armagh and Dungannon. He stayed at *The Craobh,* one of his island residences, for another two nights and a day, where he gathered together his wife, son and servants. On 13 September, they arrived at Ballindrait. They rested there and set out in the dark that night, picking up others who would make the journey with them. They crossed the Foyle near Strabane, finally reaching

[81] M Kerney Walsh, *op. cit.*, p. 46.
[82] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Rathmullan, where their ship was waiting, at daybreak. Some of the young children of O'Neill and O'Donnell, who had been fostered out, could not be located at short notice and had to be left behind. In all, ninety-nine refugees sailed from Rathmullan, on Lough Swilly, at mid-day on 15 September, 1607.

"With O'Neill went his wife, the Lady Catherina and their three sons, Hugh, whom they called the Baron Dungannon, John and Brian; Art Oge son of Cormac Mac Baron; Ferdoragh, son of Conn (who was a natural son of O'Neill); Hugh Oge and others of his family and friends. Roderick (Ruairí) O'Donnell was attended by his brother Cathbar, and his sister Nuala;[83] *Hugh, the Earl's child, wanting three weeks of being a year old; Rose, daughter of O'Dogherty and wife of Cathbar, with her son Hugh, aged two years and three months; Roderick's brother's son Donnell Oge, son of Donnell; Naghtan son of Calvagh who was son of Donnell Cairbreach O'Donnell; and other friends: - surely a distinguished company; and it is certain," say the reverend chroniclers of Tyr Connell, "that the sea has not borne, and the wind has not wafted in modern times a number of persons in one ship, more eminent, illustrious or noble in point of genealogy, heroic deeds, valour, feats of arms and brave achievements than they. Would that God had but permitted them," continue the Four Masters, "to remain in their patrimonial inheritances until the children should arrive at the age of manhood! Woe to the heart that meditated – woe to the mind that conceived – woe to the council that recommended the project of this expedition, without knowing whether they should, to the end of their lives, be able to return to their ancient principalities and patrimonies."*[84]

Much more could be written about the treacherous journey of the Earls, their forced disembarkation in France because of bad weather, their being denied entry into Spain because of the Anglo-Spanish peace Treaty, their triumphant arrival in Rome and the impressive welcomes, befitting Irish Princes, that they were given everywhere they went.

But despite never giving up on his hopes, dreams and plans to free his country from English occupation, O'Neill never again managed to organise and lead an army of resistance against England, and never again set foot on Irish soil. He lived out a modest life, under the combined patronage of Pope Paul V and King Philip III of Spain. By the time of his death, most of his kinsmen-in exile, including Ruairí O'Donnell, had already died. He himself died in Rome in July 1616, where he is buried in the church of San Pietro in Montorio. He was 76 years old. Following his departure from Ireland, the Plantation

[83] This lady had been the wife of Niall Garbh O'Donnell but had left him on his taking arms against her brother, Red Hugh.
[84] J Mitchel, *op. cit.*, p. 238-239.

of Ulster continued in earnest. All of his lands and properties, and those of Ruairí O'Donnell, were confiscated. Planters from England and Scotland moved to Ulster and were granted lands, where their descendants still remain to this day.

Some Reflections

This is a book focusing on several of the remarkable Irish people who have resisted England's occupation of Ireland down through the centuries. No one can deny that O'Neill was the personification of such resistance. His efforts, and achievements, were outstanding in his day and remain so today. He was a shrewd politician and an intelligent, resourceful and brave soldier. He was a charismatic leader, who could charm even his enemies. He understood the 'long game' of war and prepared accordingly. He was a Chieftain who enjoyed the loyalty of his clan and did all he could to preserve the ancient customs, language, religion and laws of Ireland against England's tyranny.

That he failed is far too harsh a judgment. O'Neill's legacy and example live on to this day. He showed what could be done, against all the odds, to combat the might of England's colonial power. To succeeding generations of Irish rebels, his efforts and achievements have been an enormous inspiration.

Nevertheless, his leaving of Ireland, although always intending to return, left his destitute people to a dreadful fate, without a leader to protect them; and without land, shelter or food to sustain them. The resulting vacuum left by his exile, especially after his death, gave the English the opportunity that his sheer presence, prowess and reputation had denied them for so many years. Finally, the long-awaited Plantation of Ulster went ahead, with the English carrying out the most brutal slaughter and ethnic cleansing of the native Irish in that province.

At last, or so the English believed, Ireland had been annexed and the Irish had been tamed. But, as usual, they were wrong. The Irish had learned a thing or two from O'Neill. Like O'Neill, they now became expert at feigning acceptance and submission, but secretly biding their time and plotting rebellion; O'Neill had given them a template within which to resist, without violence. And resist they did, even when their situations became absolutely desperate and seemingly hopeless, as we will see in the following Chapters. Like O'Neill's struggle, Ireland's struggle against English oppression was to prove a 'long game', sometimes fought with physical force, but often with other, equally powerful, non-physical strategies.

If Kinsale was the climax of O'Neill's downfall, it is fair to say that the time and place of the Spanish landing was outside of his control, as too, to a great extent, was the battle itself. When O'Neill was in total control there was none better. If he did not obtain the promised help from Spain for another attempt at bringing down the English, again, the peace Treaty signed by England and Spain, which made that promised help impossible, was not of his doing and was outside of his control.

And yet, despite all of the soldiers that O'Neill and his army killed, he showed human compassion too (much lacking on the English side), for instance by allowing the defeated enemy to retreat to the safety of the Pale and by burying the enemy's dead as well as his own. It must be remembered that when he decided to change sides and oppose the English, after the second Desmond Rebellion, he was putting aside his own personal ambitions and devoting his life to defending his people, and their religion, against English aggression. His country had been invaded and was well on the way to complete conquest by English forces. He was no longer an aggressor against, but a defender of, the Irish people.

O'Neill's best resistance came in the form he knew best and at which he excelled: physical force. Although he was up against an enemy with far superior armaments and resources, his cunning and versatility saw him win many victories. What he was less skilled at was showing versatility in the face of the enemy's non-physical aggression, such as bribery, relaxation of religious restrictions and, of course, England's 'divide and rule' tactics. Although he did run a successful spy network that infiltrated both the Tudor Court and Dublin Castle, the English succeeded in undermining the loyalty of O'Neill's followers in a way that O'Neill failed to anticipate or prevent. Physical combat alone, against the English, proved not to be enough.

Apologists for the Tudor colonial conquest of Ireland, both in the sixteenth century and in modern times, justify it as an inevitable clash of cultures, where a sophisticated and civilised English State was dragging a backward and barbarous people, on its doorstep, into the world of European civilisation. Such propaganda conveniently overlooks the fact that England's implied benevolence was in fact, and undeniably, founded on greed, theft, torture and murder. The reality is that the aim of the Tudor conquest of Ireland was to usurp the land and resources of a country rich in raw materials, fertile soil, rich crops, abundant cattle and plentiful marine life; and the English did not care how they did it, whether through the legitimisation of land-grabbing; or by aggressive deforestation and

plundering of natural resources; or by the obliteration of Irish culture, language, laws and religion; or by the public hanging of Ireland's revered poets and harpers; or by the banishment of Irish Catholic priests; or by the imprisonment, torture and death of those who showed any justified resistance. How England's tactics could remotely exemplify 'civilisation' is beyond rationality and comprehension.[85]

Another myth created by the English, designed to illustrate the superiority of the English and the backwardness of the Irish people, and worthy of mention here, relates to the latter's battle dress and weaponry of war. This fable, portraying a supposedly civilising and superior English armed force making short work of the stupid and stubborn Irish, was propagated in both the written word (e.g. by Edmund Spenser in his *A View of the State of Ireland)*, and in contemporary drawings and wood cuts, where Irish soldiers were pictured in bare feet, without body armour, wearing ancient dress and fighting with archaic weapons. This lie continued, and still continues, to be touted despite the fact that the Irish forces, during the Nine Years War, defeated this supposedly superior English army in the field on many occasions; that O'Neill was repeatedly recognised, admired and hailed as a formidable Irish Commander-in-Chief everywhere he went on his journey through France and Italy; and that King Henry IV of France called him one of the greatest Generals in Europe. The Irish may not have had the years of experience that the English had assimilated in warfare, but they learned fast and outstripped their enemy time and time again.

Perhaps O'Neill could have been more prescient, better prepared for things that might not go his way, more adaptable to events that lay outside of his control. But, at the end of the day, he virtually bankrupted the throne of England and brought its military might to its knees. He was a hero of the Irish people and a man whose sole purpose in later life, until the day he died, was resisting the English occupation of Ireland. He undoubtedly lived up to his Gaelic title, *Ó Neill Mór*, The Great O'Neill.

[85] One cannot help but compare the self-centred, hateful colonising tactics and motives of the Tudor and later monarchs, and their officials, in their professed objective of 'civilising' the Irish, with the actions of Irish monks on the Continent during the Dark Ages of the sixth to twelfth centuries, when they brought the lost learning of Europe back to the people of Europe, in a non-threating, selfless and generous way. Many of those monks are revered as saints to this day in the places where they set up their monasteries, such as Germany, Austria, France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland. See Chapter 1.

Chapter Three

Charles O'Conor of Belanagare (1710-1791)

WITH THE DEFEAT of the Irish and Spanish forces at Kinsale; Elizabeth I's death and the accession of her cousin James VI of Scotland to the English throne (as James I of that country); as well as O'Neill's surrender; the Flight of the Earls; and their untimely deaths in Spain and Italy, it seemed that the seventeenth century had got off to a momentous, and pretty disastrous, start for the Ulster Irish. But much worse was yet to come.

The Plantation of Ulster

A succession of private Scottish Plantations, with government support, took place in Ulster from 1606, in counties Monaghan, Antrim and Down, before the official Plantation in 1609, involving Scottish and English Planters, in counties Tyr Connell, Derry, Fermanagh, Cavan, Armagh and Tyrone. It was decided that the mistakes of the Munster Plantation would not be repeated in Ulster. No isolated confiscations of land would take place: instead, the whole of the land mass of Ulster would be confiscated and then reallocated to proposed Planters in a way that protected them, and the government, from any possible Gaelic insurrections. As a result, around half a million acres of arable land were commandeered and planted. A host of new towns sprang up, inhabited by a new Protestant population, totally loyal to the King. Land that had once been solely rural and Gaelic–Catholic owned, now became significantly urban and Protestant owned.

The ancestral lands of Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell were attainted, as were those of many other Gaelic landowners, resulting in then loss of all rights by them and their descendants. This was often carried out by quasi-legal means, by the Attorney General, Sir John Davies, and by the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Sir Arthur Chichester. They

also argued that the estates of Chieftains who had fought against the Crown in the Nine Years War, and who were now deemed traitors, should be forfeited too. Others, who owned land that had been held in gavelkind (under the ancient Brehon Law of property tenure, from time out of mind), found that their ancient titles were now deemed to have no standing under English Common Law, and so that land too was appropriated. Even land that had been surrendered and regranted in fee simple under English Common Law, by Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, was now deemed to have been awarded contrary to that very same law, its ownership was declared unlawful, and it too was commandeered.

Those landowners whose land had not been seized because of any alleged treachery, or lack of legal basis in law, suffered a 75% reduction in the size and quality of their estates. Gaelic Lords (some 300 of them), who had fought on the English side, were allowed estates of 400 hectares each, costing them £10 per year payable to the Crown. They were also permitted to have native Irish tenants, unlike Scottish and English Planters. Despite this concession, the power of Gaelic Lords in Ulster was almost completely destroyed.

Many of the new Planters, those hailing from the lowlands of Scotland, practiced the Presbyterian religion, in keeping with the Protestant reformation there. As King James I deemed it prudent to keep his Scots subjects appeased while he was preoccupied with English affairs in the English Court, he assured the intending Scottish Planters that the Ulster Plantation would be a joint venture, involving both Scotland and England. It was hoped that settling large numbers of Scots in Ireland would prevent the possibility, which was common during the Desmond Rebellion and the Nine Years War, of Scottish mercenaries coming to the military aid of the native Irish. Other Planters, those who came from the north of England, practised the Anglican religion (Church of England). Their loyalty was unwavering towards the English Crown.

As mentioned, no native Irish tenants were to be hired in the new planted estates. Instead, workers would have to be brought in from Scotland and England. Where settlers were existing landholders in Scotland or England, they had to undertake (hence the name 'Undertakers') to bring in a minimum of forty adult tenants (twenty families), from their own estates, who were required to be Protestant and English speaking. Planters were not allowed to sell on land to any native Irish. In addition, they had to maintain fortifications, arm themselves and take part in a yearly military assembly and arms inspection.

Other people and organisations who benefitted from the Plantation of Ulster included Crown officials, such as Sir John Davies and Sir Arthur Chichester, and guilds of English

craftsmen. The City of London Guilds was given land in Derry (hence the change of name to Londonderry). In addition, the Church of Ireland (Anglican) was given all of the land owned by the Catholic Church. In return, it was expected to ensure that the native population would attend Anglican services and acquire the English language.

However, the Plantation policy did not go completely according to plan. As mentioned, some Irish Lords, including those who had fought for the Crown during the Nine Years War, were allowed to retain a portion of their estates, even though the land was not as plentiful nor as good as they had previously owned. Additionally, many settlers found they could not bring in as many Scottish or English tenants as they needed, and so had to resort to employing Irish labour. Many of these labourers were the original dispossessed, who ended up living near, and working on, land that they had previously owned. Some of the Scottish Planters were Catholics who spoke, or at least understood, Gaelic. Additionally, new English Plantations were being established in America, which competed for Scottish and English tenants and colonisers.

Although the prospect of a full-scale Gaelic rebellion was remote, nevertheless a faction of Gaelic soldiers and landowners, who had formerly given allegiance to Hugh O'Neill, continued to live and fight as outlaws (so-called 'wood-kerns'), thereby necessitating an increasing number of defence fortifications to be built and protected by Crown forces The anticipated conversion of the native Irish to the Protestant religion was a failure, not least because of language differences. However, by the mid-1600s, just fifteen years after O'Neill's death, and after a third of the Irish population of Ulster had been wiped out by war, famine and massacre during the Nine Years War, there were an estimated 80,000 Protestant settlers living in Ulster. By 1720, the majority of the Ulster population was Protestant. A new, loyal, Protestant ruling class had been firmly established in Ireland.

If the aim of the Plantation of Ulster had been to anglicise, 'civilise' and control the native Irish, then the project must be judged a qualified success. Planters became the new ruling class by becoming members of parliament and judges, and by enforcing English law. Land use was changed by draining marshy land and clearing forests, and a new system of crop cultivation farming, for profit rather than subsistence, was introduced. Planters established markets and new industries, and they built churches, schools and more permanent stone-built houses. Many new towns were also built, with a central square called a 'diamond', such as in Donegal town, Derry, Dungannon, Monaghan, Raphoe and Enniskillen, for the exclusive habitation of Planters, with a network of roads linking them.

Catholicism became a minority religion, with Presbyterianism and Anglicanism in the majority, thus creating religious tensions and discrimination. The Gaelic way of living and dressing was banned. English and Scottish culture (music, dancing, language and dress) became widespread, while Gaelic culture faded.

An additional aim of the Plantation, to consolidate the English (and now also Scottish[86]) domination of Ireland, must also be seen as successful from the colonisers' point of view, albeit that it was a success secured by the introduction of a new regime of ethnic and sectarian genocide.

The remainder of the seventeenth century saw a large number of political and military clashes, many taking place in Ireland, involving wars between the three kingdoms (England, Scotland and Ireland). These involved such causes as religious intolerance; loyalty to parliament rather than to the King (and vice versa); an Irish uprising; an English Civil War; the execution of a King by English parliamentarians; the abolition of the monarchy; the establishment of a commonwealth; an English parliamentarian invasion of Ireland; more confiscation of Irish land and more Plantations; the restoration of the monarchy and, in 1690, the defeat of the last Catholic King (James II) of England, Scotland and Ireland by King William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne. All of these events had lasting and calamitous consequences for the native Irish and can only be seen as direct consequences of Hugh O'Neill's defeat at Kinsale and his subsequent flight to Rome, less than one hundred years earlier, leaving Ireland without an effective leader or military champion to oppose the disastrous changes Ireland was facing.

1641 Rebellion and the Confederate Wars

During the period of upheaval in Ulster resulting from the Plantation, the 'Old English' in the rest of Ireland remained Catholic. While they no longer controlled the Irish government, they still owned one-third of the land mass of the country and remained loyal to the Crown. Fearful of losing their land, as well as their power and influence, they petitioned the government to copper-fasten their privileged position. As part of an agreement with King Charles I (who came to the throne in 1625, after the death of James I), they loaned him money to help finance his war against Spain, in return for concessions, or 'Graces', protecting their position. But Charles renounced the Graces when the money

[86] The Union of Crowns occurred in 1603, when James VI of Scotland took over the English throne, as James I. But it was not until 1707, under the Union of Parliaments, that Scotland and England (including Wales) merged into one political entity, the Kingdom of Great Britain.

had been spent and the war was at an end. The Old English realised that they had to maintain, and indeed increase, their numbers in the Irish parliament, where they had lost their majority owing to many new Ulster Protestant members taking up seats. The new Lord Deputy, Viscount Wentworth, controlled all issues to be considered in parliament, and government officials played the ages-old English tactic of 'divide and conquer' against Protestants and Catholics. Now, not alone could the Irish parliament fail to protect the Old English, it became very capable of discriminating against them.

Wentworth confiscated a large proportion of Catholic-owned land in Connacht, being indifferent as to whether the owners were native Irish or Old English. He also alienated Scottish Planters by penalising them for not fully abiding by the conditions of their grants, and by criminalising some of the practices they brought with them to Ireland. Even members of the Protestant establishment found themselves deprived of benefits that they had come to believe themselves entitled to. Wentworth seemed unassailable, until he was recalled to England, whereupon all of his enemies in the Irish parliament united against him.

The reason for Wentworth's recall was that, in 1639, the Scottish parliament had rebelled against Charles I, and war had broken out when he attempted to force the Scottish Presbyterian Church to adopt practices similar to those of the Anglican Church, and interfered in the determination of the Scots to abolish episcopacy. He unsuccessfully petitioned the English parliament to pay for the war in Scotland, causing some of the members of that parliament to take advantage of the King's difficulties and demand reforms which would weaken his power. In 1640, the Scots won the war.

Meanwhile, in his absence, Wentworth's reforms in Ireland were being dismantled in the Irish parliament by the united actions of Old English, Ulster Planters and other Protestants. In 1641, when the Irish parliament cooperated with the English parliament by supporting a charge of treason against him, Wentworth was found guilty and was executed. The Old English in Ireland seized the opportunity of the King's problems in England to force him to regrant their Graces and to abandon plans for the Plantation of Connacht. Having successfully achieved those concessions, they attempted to rebuild their previous power and privileges in the Irish parliament. But Charles had already conceded much of his own power to the English parliament and was determined not to grant further power to the parliament in Ireland.

Catholicism in Ireland now found itself under a new threat, with an English parliament dominated by Protestants and supported by a similarly dominated Scottish parliament. Religious intolerance, and plans for new Plantations in Ireland, were under consideration in both of those jurisdictions, prompting tentative plans for an armed uprising among some Irish in Ulster. Others, hopeful of reclaiming their confiscated lands, decided to join them.

O'Neills return from the Continent to Fight

In 1641, those plans gained momentum and an insurrection commenced. Named 'The Confederates', the Irish insurgents intended to overrun Dublin castle, take prominent members of the government as prisoners and capture various defensive positions in Ulster. Their plans, however, were unsuccessful, except for the local rebellions in Ulster.

But more such local risings then took place throughout the country. The campaign, for religious equality and a stop to land confiscation, was led by Sir Phelim O'Neill, a distinguished Irish soldier who had returned from the Continent. He had forged a document claiming to contain the King's instructions to Ulstermen to rise to defend him. Those who did were also required to take an oath of loyalty to the King. Thus, O'Neill could argue that they were not rebels, but were merely protecting the King from the English parliament.

The Confederate Uprising 1641-1649

The uprising saw many Protestant Planters expelled or killed, including around a hundred at the so-called Massacre of Portadown in 1641. Unverified and exaggerated reports finding their way back to England claimed that Protestants were bearing the brunt of the violence and were having to leave their homes and return to England, or face being killed. However, according to John Dorney, "*at least as many Catholic civilians were also killed in the early months of the rebellion, as the English and Scottish forces, based in Dublin, Cork and in Ulster (where a Scottish army landed in early 1642), fought back, carrying out massacres of their own*".[87]

Having established control in most of Ulster, the Confederates marched south, where they were joined by many Old English. But they met government resistance around Drogheda, forcing them to retreat back to Ulster. The government rejected approaches seeking peace, determined to defeat this Irish insurrection for good, while the English parliament

[87] J Dorney, *The Irish Story: The Eleven Years War 1641-52*, (www.theirishstory.com /2014/01/10/ the-eleven-years-war-a-brief overview/#.YWFwZTHMLIU, 2014).

resolved to confiscate and plant even more land in Ulster. In 1642, in England, Royalists and parliamentarians declared war on each other, thus starting the English Civil War.

Despite opposition, the Confederates, with the help of the Catholic Church, established an Assembly in Kilkenny, which ruled as an effective government from 1641 until 1649. Calling itself 'The Confederate Catholic Association of Ireland', its members took an oath to serve the King and protect Catholicism, by military and other means, and to establish equal rights for Catholics and self-rule for Ireland. It was made up of Catholic landowners and Catholic clergy, headed by a Supreme Council. Armies were formed, led by experienced soldiers returning from the Continent, such as Eoghan Rua O'Neill[88] and Thomas Preston. Another objective was to assist the King in his conflict with English parliamentarians, in return for pardons for those who had taken part in the uprising.

The Ormonde Peace

In 1646, the Supreme Council of the Confederate Assembly entered into a Treaty with the Royalists in England (the 'Ormonde Peace'), which secured many of their objectives. There would be a toleration of Catholicism in Ireland and a pardon for those involved in the Rebellion. In return, Irish troops would travel to England to fight the King's cause there.

However, while the Treaty was acceptable to the Supreme Council, which was made up mainly of Catholic landowners whose interests were now being served, it was unacceptable to other members of the Confederate Assembly, such as those who had lost land in the Plantations, the Gaelic Irish and the Catholic clergy. Many felt that the King was losing the Civil War in England, so sending Irish troops there would be a waste of resources. The Assembly not alone voted against the Treaty, but also voted to oust the Supreme Council members. The Catholic Church voted to excommunicate them. The armies established by the Confederates also voted against the Treaty and waged war against remaining Protestant strongholds. But those campaigns were unsuccessful, resulting in major defeats for the Confederate armies in 1647 at Dungan's Hill in Meath and at Knocknanuss in north Cork.

[88] Eoghan Rua O'Neill was a cousin of Sir Phelim O'Neill's and a nephew of Hugh O'Neill. He had been present on the ship that left Rathmullen in 1607, in what became known as The Flight of the Earls. On the Continent, he had distinguished himself fighting as a professional soldier in the Spanish army and fought against the Dutch in Flanders during the Eighty Years War.

The Confederacy Divided and Leaderless

A new Treaty was sought with English Royalists, who had plans to restore Charles to the throne. A second 'Ormonde Peace' was brokered by the Earl of Ormonde, while many in Ireland who had previously fought on the English parliament's side now switched their allegiance to the King. Sir Phelim O'Neill's troops in Ulster rejected this new Treaty but, when he died later that year from an illness, and the Papal Nuncio (leader of the country's Catholic population) left Ireland and returned to Rome, this Irish Catholic faction was left without a leader.

Charles I Captured, Executed and the Monarchy Abolished

In January 1649, events came to a head. Charles I had been defeated by the Scottish parliamentary army in 1645. He was captured and later handed over to the English parliament. Believing in the Divine Right of Kings, Charles refused to accept their demands for a constitutional monarchy. In 1647 he escaped but was shortly afterwards recaptured and imprisoned on the Isle of Wight, from where he and the Scots formed a new alliance.

By 1648, the English parliament's New Model Army, under Oliver Cromwell, controlled England. Charles was tried and convicted of high treason and was executed in January 1649. The monarchy in England was abolished and replaced by the Commonwealth of England, with Oliver Cromwell in control.[89]

Oliver Cromwell in Ireland

Having achieved that goal, Cromwell, the newly appointed Governor General of Ireland, lost no time in sailing to Ireland with a huge army of almost 30,000 soldiers, determined to bring the Irish under the control of the English parliament. His many atrocities in Ireland have become well known to successive Irish populations and have resulted in him becoming one of the most loathed and despised of all the English conquerors of Ireland (despite modern attempts to claim that his actions were not overly excessive compared to acceptable standards of warfare at that time).

He claimed he was in Ireland to avenge the killing and expulsion of Protestant Ulster Planters in the Rebellion of 1641. But other reasons, too, prompted his actions: such as his

[89] It was not until 1660 that the monarchy was restored, with the coronation of Charles' son, Charles II.

hatred of all things Catholic;[90] the fact that the towns of Wexford and Waterford had been bases for Royalist naval assaults on English ships during the wars; and that he was in debt to his creditors and needed to confiscate and plant Irish land in order to repay pledges of ten million pounds that he had already asked for and received. In addition, remaining Royalists in England had signed a Treaty with Catholics in Ireland, and Cromwell was determined to see off that Catholic threat.

Dublin and Drogheda Taken

In August 1649, following a failed attempt by Irish Confederate forces to overrun Dublin (the last remaining centre of parliamentary power in Ireland), Cromwell seized the opportunity to safely land his fleet of over one hundred ships, packed with soldiers and arms, into the capital. He then proceeded to conquer other ports on the east coast, including Drogheda, where combined defenders of Royalist and Confederate soldiers held out for a week against his attack. Cromwell's strategy was to demand surrender from the inhabitants of a town, on apparently generous terms, or let them suffer the consequences if they refused. In Drogheda, the commander of the Irish army, Aston, refused to surrender, although others did. Cromwell ordered that no quarter be given to any of the enemy soldiers, whether they had surrendered or not, nor to the civilians and Catholic clergy who had taken refuge in St Peter's church. All of 3,500 people were executed in cold blood.

Wexford, Waterford, Clonmel, Limerick and Galway Taken

Next, a division of his army, led by his son-in-law Henry Ireton, secured opposition bases in Ulster, while Cromwell himself went on to attack Wexford and Waterford. In Wexford, despite ongoing negotiations about a surrender, he burned the town, killing two thousand soldiers and 1,500 civilians. Waterford held out over the winter of 1649, but was eventually taken in 1650, after a long siege. Clonmel (in 1650), Limerick (in 1651) and Galway (in 1652) also surrendered.

[90] Cromwell was a Puritan who believed in living a hard-working, pure life, with a pure soul, in accordance with the Bible. According to him, only such people would enter Heaven. Any enjoyment derived from sports, alcohol or theatres was not tolerated, although he did enjoy leisure activities himself. Sundays were strictly observed, with all work banned. Even Christmas festivities were banned. Cromwell hated the Catholic religion and he especially hated Irish Catholics.

Kilkenny, Cork and Most of Munster Taken

Cromwell's attack on the centre of Confederate power, Kilkenny, saw him suffer heavy losses of two thousand troops, but eventually Kilkenny, too, surrendered (in 1650), on the condition that all would be granted safe passage out of the country. In Munster, a Protestant faction in the Royalist army mutinied against the Confederates, allowing Cork, and most of Munster, to fall to Cromwell too.

Irish Protestants Surrender

In May 1650,[91] Charles II reneged on his father's Treaty with Irish Confederates and entered into a new Treaty with Scottish (Protestant) Covenanters. Facing inevitable defeat, many of the Protestant Royalists in Ireland then accepted surrender terms with Cromwell, or switched sides and joined his parliamentary army.

Irish Catholics Surrender

Cromwell's opposition in Ireland was now reduced to mainly Catholic forces, who questioned why they should remain loyal to their commander, Ormonde, when his King was no longer willing to acknowledge his alliance with them. With little hope of success left, the Irish, too, surrendered in 1652. As Dorney states, *"As much as a third of Ireland's population had died by 1652, the Catholic Church was driven underground and the Catholic landowning class had been smashed".*[92]

Cromwell Defeats Charles II in Scotland

Cromwell, by that stage, had left Ireland in the hands of his son-in-law, while he went to Scotland, where the Scots, in 1649, had proclaimed Charles I's son, Charles II, as their King. But Cromwell won a decisive battle victory over Charles II and the Scots at Dundee in 1651 and then moved on to England, where new reforms were being introduced in the parliament there, including one which bestowed him with the title 'Lord Protector' for life.

Settlement of Ireland Act 1652

Following the defeat of the Confederate army in Ireland, an Act for the Settling of Ireland was passed, in 1652. As John Morrill states,

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[91] Charles II was King of Scotland from 1649 to 1651. He was King of England, Scotland and Ireland from the 1660 Restoration until his death in 1685.
[92] J Dorney, *op. cit.*

"It identified four categories of persons who would lose their lives and all their property . . ." (an estimated 80,000 men). It also allowed for *" . . . the free passages to the Continent of 34,000 more, and it anticipated that almost all other Irish and/or Catholics would lose one-third or two thirds of their land. But such right to land as they retained was not to the land they had previously owned. Rather, the act provides that one- or two-thirds was 'to be assigned in such places in Ireland, as the parliament, in order to the more effectual settlement of the peace of that nation, shall think fit to appoint for that purpose' ".*[93]

Overview of Cromwell in Ireland

As well as 80,000 people losing all of their land and being relocated to barren regions of Connacht, it is estimated that as many as 600,000 Irish people died as a result of Cromwell's Irish campaign. There was a 42% decline in the population between 1641 and 1652, with 11 million acres of land subjected to a scorched earth policy.

Additionally, Cromwell engaged in the mass slaughter of the civilian population, as well as dispossessing them of their land, and in the transportation of 50,000 Catholics, including children, to the Caribbean as indented labourers. Of the large territories of Catholic-owned land that he confiscated, much of it was given to his New Model Army soldiers, who then settled in Ireland. He kept 1,200 acres in Offaly for himself.

During the time of Cromwell's Commonwealth and Protectorate (1650-1660), Ireland was under military rule. The practice of the Catholic religion was banned and Catholic clergy, when caught, were executed. Similar restraints were imposed on the Anglican Church. However, some Catholic (Royalist) landowners had their lands restored following Cromwell's death (1658) and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. Nevertheless, a remaining legacy of the Eleven Years War was the overwhelming transfer of land ownership from an Old Catholic elite to a new Protestant elite.

Cromwell's Death

Cromwell died in 1658. His funeral was one fit for a monarch, with his coffin displaying many royal symbols. His burial place, in Westminster Abbey, was even more elaborate than that of former Kings. But within a few years the monarchy had been re-established. In January 1661, the twelve surviving parliamentarians responsible for the trial and

[93] J Morrill, *Cromwell, Parliament, Ireland and a Commonwealth in Crisis: 1652 Revisited*, Parliamentary History, vol. 30, pt. 2 (2011), p. 198.

execution of Charles I were tried, convicted and sentenced to being hung, drawn and quartered. The three regicides who had since died, including Cromwell, had their remains exhumed and brought to Tyburn for execution. The bodies were dragged through the streets and then hung in public view for several hours. Cromwell's head was severed from his body, placed on a 20-foot pole and put on display, outside parliament, for twenty years. The bodies of all three were buried in an unmarked grave near Tyburn gallows. Cromwell's head was eventually buried in Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, in 1957. His death may have been the end of Cromwell, but it was certainly not the end of English State persecution of Catholics, Irish or otherwise.

Charles II and the Restoration of the Monarchy

Shortly after Charles I's execution in 1649, his son Charles II was proclaimed King of Scotland, while England became a Republic led by Cromwell. After Cromwell's successes in Ireland, he turned his attention to Charles II, whom he defeated at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. Charles fled to the Continent, where he remained, in exile, until 1660. Following Cromwell's death, Charles was restored to the throne of England and Ireland and ruled until his death in 1685.

James II, William of Orange and the Battle of the Boyne

When Charles II died, his brother, the Catholic James II, took over as King of England and Ireland (and as King James VII of Scotland). His reign was short-lived (lasting barely three years), during which time conspirators plotted to depose him; William of Orange invaded England; James fled from William's army to the safety of France; the English parliament invited William and his wife Mary to rule instead of James, and they were subsequently crowned.

In a major battle fought in Ireland, James attempted to regain his throne. But he was defeated by William and fled again to Catholic France, where he remained permanently in exile. By the end of James' reign, the English parliament had become more powerful than the monarchy, but it did not replace it, as it had done in the reign of Charles I.

Like his immediate predecessors, James II had believed in the Divine Right of Kings and had clashed with parliament when he attempted to overrule it, by bringing in his own conflicting decisions by royal decree. His prosecution of Anglican bishops for seditious libel, although unsuccessful, had led to anti-Catholic rioting and fears of a new civil war.

When his baby son, James Francis Edward, a Catholic, was born in 1688, there were fears of a new Catholic dynasty becoming established in England.

During those years, France was becoming an increasingly ambitious power. Before his death, Charles II had signed a Treaty with the French King, Louis XIV, whereby Charles would secretly convert to Catholicism and send English warships to assist Louis' war against the Protestant Dutch Republic.

The Glorious Revolution

William III of Orange had successfully defended the Netherlands against several invasion attempts by France, between 1672 and 1680, and was recognised as a champion defender of Protestant power. He then married Mary, James II's Protestant daughter who, in the event of the ageing James' death, would be next in line to the succession of the English throne. William had seen the opportunity for harnessing the power of the English navy against France, but the birth of James' Catholic son in 1688 changed his plans.

Responding to English invitations to usurp the English throne, William landed in Devon, whereupon King James' troops abandoned the King and joined with William, leaving James with no other option than to flee to France. In April 1689, King James was declared to have abandoned the throne and William and Mary were crowned joint sovereigns of England and Ireland, with Scotland following suit. The Royal House of Stuart had fallen, in what became known as 'The Glorious Revolution'.

Changes in Ireland

Prior to William and Mary's coronation, however, things had been changing in Ireland. The first Catholic Viceroy for over one hundred years, the Earl of Tyrconnell, had been appointed and increasingly more appointments of Catholics to high positions, such as judgeships and privy councillors, were being made. Although the Church of Ireland had not been disestablished, fewer Catholics were paying tithes to Protestant ministers; instead, subsidies were being given to Catholic bishops. Town charters were replaced by corporations, mostly Catholic in composition. On the question of land settlement, there was a growing demand to repeal the various Acts that had robbed Catholics of their lands. Protestants, seeing which way the wind was blowing, started to sell up and leave for England. Change was definitely in the air, but the 'Glorious Revolution' in England put paid to Irish Catholics' plans to retake their country.

James II Attempts to Retake Power

When James II returned from France in 1689, with a plan to recapture his throne, he landed in the only place that remained loyal to him, Ireland. But he intended to be King of England and Scotland, as well as Ireland, so Irish support, though welcome, was merely a means to an end. Accordingly, James would not promise the Irish anything that undermined English control over Ireland. On the other hand, the Irish wanted from James a reversal of previous land settlements and the restoration of the Catholic Church, and they did gain some potential favours in proposed legislation to be passed in the event of James winning the war against William. As JG Simms states,

"After much wrangling, the land settlement was reversed and the property of the Williamites as rebels was declared to be confiscated. Liberty of conscience was decreed; tithes were to be paid by Catholics to their priests, by Protestants to their ministers. Irish trade was to be freed from the restrictions of English law . . . The proceedings of the parliament represented, though not completely, the aspirations of the 'Old English' – Catholics of English stock – rather than those of the Gaelic Irish. Had James won the war, its legislation would have replaced a Protestant oligarchy with a Catholic oligarchy; it would not have undone the English conquest or restored Gaelic rule. James insisted on the maintenance of Poynings' Law to ensure Ireland's subordination to the English Crown, and the Protestant Church of Ireland was not officially disestablished".[94]

But Ireland had also grown more militant. As King, James II had set about dismantling Protestant militias in Ireland, while his Viceroy, Tyrconnell, had raised a strong army of Irish Catholics, known as Jacobites, who had been loyal to the exiled King. Soon these Jacobites became the dominant force in Ireland, encountering only a few pockets of Protestant resistance.

James, with French support, was ready to recapture his throne. In March 1689, he landed in Kinsale. Almost all of the country was under his control, apart from the walled town of Derry and the island town of Enniskillen, both of which became major locations of resistance over the next few months. Derry was held under siege for three months until relieved by Williamite forces. The Protestants of Enniskillen fought the Jacobites hard, forcing them to withdraw.

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[94] JG Simms, *The Restoration and the Jacobite War (1660-1691),* in TW Moody and FX Martin (eds.), *The Course of Irish History* (Cork, 1984), p. 210.

The Battle of the Boyne

After the Jacobite defeat at Enniskillen, 20,000 of William's men, led by Friedrich von Schönberg, a European career commander considered 'the ablest soldier of his age', landed at Bangor, seized the town of Carrigfergus and headed south. At Dundalk, the two armies of James and William faced each other, and remained there throughout the winter. Both sides brought in reinforcements. William himself landed in Carrigfergus on June 14, 1690. James considered his best defence of Dublin against William's attack lay in setting up camp on the southern bank of the River Boyne, and he did so on 29 June, 1690. William arrived at the opposite bank sometime later.

On James' side there were 23,000 men, made up mostly of Irish Catholics, with outdated weaponry and little military experience. He also had 6,000 French soldiers. William had 37,000 soldiers, mostly English, with Dutch and Danish too, all of whom had experience of fighting against France and all of whom had modern weapons. William's attack was split into three groups, and easily outmanoeuvred his rival, although Schönberg was slain in battle by the Irish. Seeing that he could not win, James ordered a retreat, with hardly any losses.

The Siege of Limerick

The battle may have been won by William, but the Jacobites were not defeated. Most headed south to Dublin and then west to Limerick. James himself once again fled to France. A few days later, William captured Dublin and demanded total repentance from the Irish soldiers, on pain of suffering further forfeiture of their land. But the remaining Jacobites successfully defended Limerick and remained there, under siege, until 1691. By this stage the English wanted peace in Ireland and an end to the war. Their offer to negotiate terms of disengagement with the Irish, led by Patrick Sarsfield (the Earl of Lucan), was finally accepted, in the face of starvation by the Irish soldiers and civilians and a realisation that their cause was now irretrievably lost.

The Treaty of Limerick and The Flight of the Wild Geese

The resulting Treaty of Limerick dealt with two main issues: the military surrender of the Irish and the restoration of property and religious rights to Catholics. Under the terms of surrender, Jacobite soldiers were guaranteed regimental safe passage to France, with their arms, and their wives and children, where the Irish Brigade of James II still operated under the French flag. Up to twenty thousand Irish troops chose that option. Their departure,

and that of other individual Irish soldiers to the French, Spanish and Austrian armies, became known as The Flight of the Wild Geese. Some two thousand Irish soldiers chose to return to their homes, while one thousand enlisted in William's army.

Under the Civil Articles of the Treaty, the rights of the Catholic Jacobite gentry who chose to remain in Ireland were protected, so long as they swore an oath of allegiance to King William III and Queen Mary II; their property rights would be restored, and they would be allowed to bear arms. Those who chose not to take the oath would remain under suspicion. But their situation became perilous when the Vatican acknowledged James II as the rightful King of Ireland, and disavowed William and Mary, leading to the enactment of a series of Penal Laws, starting in 1695, which were not fully relaxed or revoked until the 1770s. Many Catholic gentry fled Ireland into exile on the Continent – another manifestation of the Flight of the Wild Geese.

Ireland Lost

By the end of the seventeenth century, the English had finally succeeded in the suppression of all of Ireland, having no qualms about imposing their rule by violence, killing, war, genocide, famine, land seizure, transportation, enforced displacement and emigration. They had, of course, acted this way in the past, just as they would act again in the years, decades and centuries to come.

Gaelic Ireland now appeared to have virtually nothing left to fight for, nor fight with. Despite the protections agreed under the Articles of the Treaty of Limerick, these were undermined in just a few years by the Penal Laws, which reinforced the victories and power won by the English, and reduced the native Irish to non-persons under the law (except for when they were deemed criminals), with no rights, little or no land or other property, no education, no language, no religion, no culture, no laws to protect them, no opportunities for personal advancement and no soldiery to fight on their behalf. Resisting this oppression by physical force was now virtually impossible.

Alternative Forms of Resistance Emerge

But resistance of a different kind did emerge, right under the unsuspecting noses of the Protestant population. That covert resistance, on the Gaelic Irish side, came from scholars who had a realisation that knowledge of Ireland's unique culture and history would now disappear forever unless steps were taken immediately to protect and preserve it, until it could be handed on, freely and legally, to the future generations. But it also coincided,

ironically, with the desire of members of the 'New Anglo-Irish'[95] to create an acceptable genealogy for themselves, one at a distance from the worst excess of English colonialism associated with the events of the seventeenth century, and, at the same time, one that dissociated them from the Catholic religion.

The Catholic Church Resists

Resistance against England also came in another form, from the Catholic Church. For instance, despite now being outlawed, the Church made sure there were enough recruits to the priesthood in Ireland by creating Irish Colleges on the Continent, where they could be trained. The Church started to build up its resources in Ireland by appointing bishops to long-forgotten sees. Religious orders, especially the Franciscans, increased recruitment and worked secretly with resistance activists. In addition, Gaelic Ireland's relationship with France and Spain remained strong, based as it was on the Catholic religion and the Church's counter-reformation drive.

Once young recruits had been ordained in the Irish Colleges,[96] they returned, incognito, to Ireland, administered the sacraments and preached the Catholic faith to the people, saying Mass in remote, isolated areas, with 'Mass rocks' as altars, and with look-outs posted to warn of approaching soldiers. Penalties could be severe. *"While the priest said Mass, faithful sentries watched from nearby hilltops to give timely warning of the approaching priest hunter and his guard of British soldiers. But sometimes the troops came on them unawares, and the Mass rock was splattered with his blood, and men, women and children caught in the crime of worshipping God among the rocks were frequently slaughtered on the mountainside."*[97]

While bishops and most clergy were banished, parishes could retain one priest, who must be registered with the authorities. Only one priest was permitted per parish (although, more often than not, a single priest administered to more than one parish). Those priests were all of declining age and capacity, the intention being that when they died, they would not be replaced, and the practice of the Catholic religion would die with them. Priests who defied self-banishment were, if caught, put to death, as were those who sheltered them.

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[95] The 'New Anglo-Irish' were those English who had arrived in Ireland around the time of the Reformation, prior to the Ulster Plantation, the Cromwellian invasion and the Penal Laws.

[96] There were over 30 such colleges on the Continent, including those in Spain, the Netherlands, France, Italy and Belgium.

[97] Source: https://catholicculture.org/culture.library/view.cfm?recnum=6416, citing S MacManus.

However, most of the eighteenth century in Ireland passed very differently from the previous one. There were no great battles, no great Plantations and no great land confiscations. Because there was little left, there was little left that the English needed to do. They must have rested easy, content that they had finally conquered Ireland and that Gaelic Ireland finally faced extinction. But, how wrong they were. The ordinary Gaelic Irish found other, covert, ways to resist, such as by exercising patience, by feigning obedience and subservience, by exploiting loopholes, by forming secret societies, by taking advantage of any opportunities that arose, by seeking help from the Continent and much more.

One of the most successful of those who, without physical violence of any kind, resisted and subverted English/British[98] power in Ireland was Charles O'Conor of Belanagare in County Roscommon, whose background, life and legacy is examined in the remainder of this Chapter.

Charles O'Conor of Belanagare (1710 – 1791)[99]

Charles O'Conor was the most prominent historian and antiquarian[100] of his time, and one of the most notable Catholic men of the eighteenth century. His life story amply illustrates the effect of land confiscation on Catholic nobles who fought for the Stuart cause, and the effect of the Penal Laws on Catholic families of Gaelic nobility, in terms of religious discrimination, further forfeiture of property and demise of their way of life. It also illustrates the passive resistance engaged in by the Catholic cultural elite, and their determination to preserve and protect Ireland's true history as recorded in her ancient manuscripts.

Before examining Charles O'Conor's lineage, cultural background, education, literary achievements and legacy, it is necessary to take a quick look at Ireland's legal system

[98] With the Union of the Scottish and English parliaments taking place in 1707, the use of the terms 'England' and 'English' may, when referring to events after that date, now be supplanted by the terms 'Britain' and 'British', given that the new State became one political entity, the Kingdom of Great Britain. However, since the seat of power remained in London, and the overwhelming majority of Members of the Westminster parliament were English, the term 'England' and 'English' may still be used.

[99] Much of the following information is based on research carried out by P Herron Ó Síodhacháin, *Rediscovering Ireland's Ancient Laws* (PhD Thesis, University of Limerick, 2013).

[100] An antiquarian was a person who collected and studied ancient artefacts, in O'Conor's case ancient manuscripts, with a view to gaining a better understanding of ancient history.

before it was completely outlawed, and at the extent and content of the Penal Laws introduced to Ireland after 1695.

The Brehon Laws

We have already seen that the laws of gavelkind (where clan lands were held in trust for the clan by its Chieftain) and tanistry (where the Chieftain held his position by way of election, rather than primogeniture) came under attack from Henry VIII and Elizabeth I by the implementation of the system of 'surrender and regrant'. Under the new system, the land was regranted back to the Chieftain in fee simple under English Common Law and ultimately reverted to the Crown. Additionally, when it suited them, the English declared the 'surrender and regrant' system contrary to English Common Law and confiscated the estates that were based on it. They had no scruples, no pretence at being fair or consistent. Their law, as it operated, was a barely concealed justification for State land grabs and Catholic persecution.

On the other hand, the Brehon Laws, far from being the 'mere customs of an uncivilised people', as they were disparagingly referred to by the English, governed all aspects of Ireland's hierarchical social structure and social interaction, including economic and social contracts, property rights, inheritance rights, marriage and child rearing, and crime and punishment. The laws were applied universally across the entire country though a sophisticated legal system, involving legal education, professional jurists, Courts, judges, fines and other forms of punishment. The philosophical belief system of the Druid class, dating back to the Milesian invasion, underpinned the Brehon Laws.[101]

The Penal Laws

The Penal Laws, which replaced the Brehon Laws for Irish people in seventeenth-century Ireland, were essentially designed by the English to demoralise and degrade the people they targeted. Irish nineteenth-century historian WEH Lecky claims that they affected seventy-five per cent of the population in four discreet ways.

Firstly, they were designed to deprive Catholics of their civil rights; deprive them of the right to vote or stand for election; deprive them of the right to practice law and deprive them of the right to own a horse of greater value than £5, at the risk of forfeiting one of

[101] Further reference to these laws which, although banished and almost forgotten in the centuries to come continued to interest and inspire the Gaelic Irish, will be made throughout this book.

greater value to a Protestant neighbour. As Lecky points out: *"In his own country the Catholic was only recognised by the law, 'for repression and punishment'. The Lord Chancellor Bowes and the Chief Justice Robinson both distinctly laid down from the bench 'that the law does not suppose any such person to exist as an Irish Roman Catholic' ".*[102]

A second category of Penal Laws identified by Lecky were those designed to keep the Irish in a state of perpetual educational ignorance. Catholics could not attend university, or run a school, or act as tutors or send their children abroad for education. A reward of ten pounds sterling was offered to any person who reported infringements of this law. Such schools as did officially exist to allow for the education of Catholic children,[103] were designed merely to convert them to Protestantism and alienate them from their parents.

Lecky's third classification of Penal Laws were those that attacked the property rights of Irish Catholics, who were not allowed to buy or inherit land, nor to receive it as a gift. Nor could they hold life annuities, or mortgages or leases in excess of thirty-one years. Such leases on land that they were permitted to own could not produce a profit of more than one-third of the land's rental value, otherwise the lease would be awarded to any Protestant who discovered and informed on this practice. Similarly, a Protestant informer could be granted land bought secretly by a Catholic. On the death of a Catholic landowner, his land was equally divided among all his sons, unless one of them turned Protestant, in which case he inherited it all.

An additional law ordered all Catholic clergy to leave the country by May 1698, on pain of transportation. If any returned to Ireland, they would be guilty of high treason and punished accordingly. However, the number of Catholics was so large that it was almost impossible to single out clergy (in disguise), with the result that few such prosecutions were actually carried out.

Lecky sums up the effect of the Penal Laws in this way:

"*In this manner Catholic landlords were gradually but surely impoverished. Their land passed almost universally into the hands of Protestants, and the few who succeeded in retaining large estates did so only by compliances which destroyed the wholesale moral influence that would normally have attached to their position . . . It was intended to make them poor and to keep them*

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[102] WEH Lecky, *A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 1972), pp. 41-42.
[103] Charter Schools, introduced in 1733 by Church of Ireland Primate of Armagh, Hugh Boulter, aimed to prevent the growth of Catholic schools and keep the Kingdom 'safe from the dangers of Catholicism'.

poor, to crush in them every germ of enterprise, to degrade them into a servile caste who could never hope to rise to the level of their oppressors. The division of classes was made as deep as possible, and every precaution was taken to perpetuate and to embitter it".[104]

Catholic Ireland was thus thrust into a long, dark period of oppression, discrimination and enforced ignorance. The Brehon Laws which had once governed them with justice, fairness and equality were replaced, by members of a supposedly higher civilisation, with laws which were based on the denial of any kind of justice, fairness or equality.

We have seen how hostile Sir John Davies was to the Brehon Law system. But, even he had to admit that under that system:

". . . there is no nation under the sonnne that doth love equal and indifferent justice better than the Irish; or will rest better satisfied with the execution thereof, although it bee against themselves; so as they may have the protection and benefit of the lawe, when upon just cause they do desire it".[105]

That being the case, he nevertheless did everything in his power to undermine and attack Brehon Law and replace it with his unfair, unjust and discriminatory English Common Law, for those were the principles upon which English law, as practised in Ireland, were based. And that was the system of laws in Ireland into which, in 1710, Charles O'Conor of Belanagare was born.

Charles O'Conor's Lineage

Charles O'Conor was the eldest son of Denis O'Conor of Belanagare and Mary O'Rourke of Breffni. One of his direct ancestors was Roderick O'Conor (Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair d.1198), the last independent High King of Ireland. Charles' great-great-grandfather had participated in the scheme of 'surrender and regrant' in Elizabethan times and, in return, had been awarded the title Sir Hugh O'Conor Don in 1535. On his death, his estate was divided equally among his four sons.

Charles' grandfather, also called Charles O'Conor (c. 1633-96), was a grandson of Hugh O'Conor Don. Charles' granduncle, Major Owen O'Conor (1632-92), a brother of Charles' grandfather, in turn became head of the O'Conor family. But, as a result of the family's

[104] WEH Lecky, *op. cit*., pp. 44-45.
[105] Sir J Davies, *op. cit.,* p. 283.

involvement in the rebellion of 1641 and in the Confederate Wars, the hereditary lands of the O'Conors were confiscated.

However, when the monarchy was restored under Charles II in 1660, the Major's lands were reappointed to him. But several years were to pass before his family could take possession, as the Adventurers already in possession resisted the restoration. Not many years later, the Major raised three troop of horsemen to fight the cause of James II against William of Orange, acting as his Governor of Banagher; but, following defeat at the Battle of the Boyne, the Major surrendered the garrison in 1691, and died the following year, without male issue.

The Major's brother, Charles (our Charles O'Conor's grandfather), inherited the estates, but he outlived the Major, by only four years. This Charles had been attainted for treason and lived the remainder of his life as an outlaw, as did his eldest son Felim, who fled to France and died there unmarried.

The ownership of the estate lands, and head of the O'Conor house at Belanagare, then fell to Denis O'Conor, the father of our Charles O'Conor. But because Denis' father, uncle and brother had all been attainted, the estate lands were again forfeited, under a 1699 Penal Law statute. Following a legal battle in 1701, ably conducted on his behalf by his wife's uncle, Counsellor Terence McDonagh,[106] Denis regained the title to part of the lands, consisting of some 700 acres. Despite this legal victory, Denis could not regain possession, nor take up residence, for another twenty-five years because of further Penal Law restrictions. Instead, he lived in a cottage at Kilmactranny in County Sligo. That is where our Charles was born and raised until he was fifteen, when the family finally gained possession of, and took up residence in, the Belanagare estate.

Gaelic Hospitality

Denis O'Conor was a generous host and his house:

"*soon became the rendezvous for the numerous ill-fated Irish Catholic gentlemen of the province. His hospitable door was never shut against those in misfortune and distress, and both Catholic laymen and cleric felt at home beneath his roof*".[107]

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[106] Terence Mc Donagh was the only Catholic to have a special dispensation to practice law, something normally strictly forbidden under the Penal Laws.

[107] O'Conor Don, *The O'Conors of Connaught* (Dublin, 1891), cited in Donal O'Sullivan, *Carolan, The Life and Times of an Irish Harper* (Cork, 2001), p. 41.

Terence McDonagh, the lawyer, also gave assistance and protection to many of his own less fortunate countrymen and women, such as the seventeenth-century antiquarian Ruaraí Ó Flaithearta (1629-1718) and his own brother-in-law Tadgh Ó Ruairc, OFM, Bishop of Killala (1707-34). When Terence McDonagh died, the Bishop moved into the O'Conor household, as did McDonagh's widow.

Revd Charles O'Conor, grandson and biographer of our Charles, states in his memoirs of the O'Conor family,

"Denis, who was himself a rank Jacobite, enjoyed in a peculiar manner the company of every person of that party, and particularly of every person who could recount the scenes of distress they were condemned to travel through at home and abroad; he was a man of generous, hospitable, elevated disposition. Bred up in adversity himself, his feeling heart sympathised in the distresses of others, and his house was the general rendezvous of a number of unfortunate ladies and gentlemen, who once lived in splendour and honour, and lost their properties by the revolution. It was this perpetual flux and reflux of the unfortunate, that modelled the heart of his son Charles to that strong feeling for the common calamities of the old Irish and English of the Pale, which is so conspicuous throughout all his writings".[108]

The hospitality of the O'Conor household was offered to a great many people, residents and visitors alike, including those still involved in traditional Gaelic learning and culture. One frequent visitor was Turlough O'Carolan, the renowned harpist, of whom the O'Conors were traditional Gaelic patrons. Other visitors included the educationalists Seán Ó Gadra, Tadhg Ó Rodaighe and members of the Ó Duibhgennáin[109] and Ó Cuirnín families. The O'Conors, therefore, *"had quite close or very close connections with a circle which included two of Ireland's most important antiquaries of the latter half of the seventeenth century, Ireland's most important native musician of the eighteenth century, and members of two of the old learned hereditary families".*[110]

As mentioned, a resident in the O'Conor household, from 1717 until his death in 1734, was the Franciscan priest and bishop, Tadhg Ó Ruairc, who was a brother of Charles' mother,

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[108] Revd C O'Conor, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the late Charles O'Conor of Belanagare esq, MRIA (*Dublin, nd*),* p. 143.

[109] A member of this family taught Charles the art of copying manuscripts and left many to him on his death in 1734.

[110] D Ó Catháin, *Charles O'Conor of Belanagare: Antiquary and Irish Scholar,* in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland,* vol. 119 (1989), p. 139.

and who was to have a great influence on Charles' education.[111] He had been a chaplain to Prince Eugene of Savoy and had been appointed Bishop of Killala in 1707. When he returned to Ireland to take up office in his diocese, in defiance of the Penal Laws, "*he was dogged as a popish spy, obliged to change his name to that of Fitzgerald, to skulk some years in the bogs of Joyce country, and finally to abscond among his relatives in the house of Belanagare. . .*".[112]

Charles O'Conor's Early Education

Ó Catháin informs us that this Bishop was one of Charles O'Conor's tutors, and *"used to make him copy 'the best English authors', translate Cicero into English and memorise 'the most approved writers ancient and modern'. Under the Bishop's supervision he was not allowed neglect his literary studies in Irish either"*.[113]

Charles proved to be an exceptional student, a remarkable achievement considering that the Penal Laws had forbidden the education of Catholic children. As a young boy he had been taught within the hedge school tradition, where he had studied grammar and Latin.

Hedge schools were the Catholic population's response to the ban on Catholic education. Being illegal, they were of necessity secretive, they had no fixed premises or permanent equipment, their teachers were meagrely, if at all, paid and no examinations or awards were given. Yet, they thrived all over Ireland. They were first introduced in 1641 and continued to operate throughout the Cromwellian and Penal Law times, right up to the nineteenth century. They replaced the Bardic schools, which dated back to the time of the Druids, well before Christianity came to Ireland.

Many hedge schoolteachers were poets and translators who had lost traditional forms of teaching opportunities after the introduction of the Penal Laws. One such poet, Eoghan Rua Ó Súilleabháin, who, looking for a position, wrote a poem advertising his teaching skills to Father Fitzgerald of Knocknagree parish in north County Cork in 1782. The poem not alone sets out the teacher's abilities, but also the wide-ranging curriculum of the time, which included reading and writing, catechism, book-keeping, mensuration, geometry, navigation, trigonometry, English grammar and law.

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[111] This cleric had been in positions of influence on the Continent and had obtained special safe passage documents from the Emperor of Austria to return to Ireland in 1703.

[112] Revd C O'Conor, *op. cit.,* p. 164.

[113] D Ó Catháin, *op. cit.,* p. 140.

William Carleton[114] adds surveying, astronomy and geography to the list of subjects taught in a typical hedge school. In addition to relating his own experiences of being taught in such a school, he cites sources such as hedge schoolmasters' manuscript compilations, containing Irish poems and legends, translations of the classics, simple legal form transactions and prayers.[115]

Anyone who reported the existence of such banned schools was rewarded. Penalties for keeping such a school were harsh, including deportation to the West Indies. However, as with many of the Penal Laws, not all transgressions were punished. The task would have been too great.[116] Nevertheless, in Limerick for example, from 1714–22, there were nineteen grand jury presentments against Catholic schoolmasters, as well as several prosecutions of parents who had sent their sons to France or Spain to be educated. Indicted schoolteachers could be transported as indentured servants, for four to seven years, to the Americas.

Providing evidence that suggested that Gaelic culture and education (despite it being outlawed) was superior to that of England at the time, Greg Koos records notable differences between Irish hedge schoolmasters in America and their English migratory equivalents, which suggested that the Irish system and content reflected *"rich and continuing traditions which may have descended from aspects of Gaelic or early modern popular culture*", such as memory work, as taught in the old Bardic schools.[117]

That this was true of Charles' hedge school education is backed up by Charles' biographer. His grandson, Revd Charles O'Conor, wrote, *"excepting the few instructions Mr O'Conor had received from the Bishop his uncle, his education may be said to have been completely Irish. It was rather Bardic than modern, it was such as he would have had in the hall of Tara".*

This education, filled with the stories and tales of long ago, *"so modelled his tender mind, that extensive reading, correspondence, and intercourse with men, could not entirely efface, even in maturer years, the tincture he had received in his youth".*[118]

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[114] W Carlton, *The Hedge School*, in DJ O'Donoghue (ed.), *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (London, 1896), pp. 198-266.
[115] G Koos, *The Irish Schoolmaster in the American Backcounry*, in *New Hibernia Review/ Irish Éireannach Nua,* vol. 5, no. 2 (Summer, 2001), pp. 9-26.
[116] *Ibid.,* pp. 13-14.
[117] *Ibid.,* p. 22.
[118] Revd C O'Conor, *op. cit.,* pp. 164-165.

Charles' Later Education

At seventeen years of age Charles attended a tutor in Dublin, a Mr Walter Skelton,[119] where he learned French, Latin, science and mathematics, as well as "*the cause of the variety of the seasons, the inequality of days and nights, the wonders of vision, the nature of fluids, and the order of the universe*".[120]

Many years later, Charles wrote of the effect Mr Skelton's teaching had on him, *" . . . my mind was enlightened, and my heart, contracted hitherto by the narrowness of such selfish and bigoted times, began to dilate and to expand itself by contemplation. I felt forcibly the presence of the Deity vivifying and actuating all nature, and bestowing on all worthless mortals exhaustless treasures, while they themselves were denying a miserable pittance to those, who were created for the blessings of Providence as well as they".*[121]

Charles' Cultural Education

The cultural side of Charles' education included fencing, learning the violin and dancing. He was also taught how to play the harp by O'Carolan. While in Dublin, as well as attending to his studies, Charles socialised with the Irish literati at the house of Tadhg Ó Neachtain and his father Seán, the main meeting place of those interested in Irish language, culture and lore in Dublin, where there was *" . . . a web of patronage and exchange of manuscripts among the Irish scholars in the Dublin of the time".* Those present included, *"Ó Neachtain, Raymond, his slightly older colleague Francis Stoughton Sullivan (Professor of Laws at Trinity) and other patrons of traditional Irish learning".*[122]

Charles' Bardic Education

Additionally, the Revd Charles attributes Charles' Bardic education to the harpist O'Carolan who, he states, was *"almost the chief conductor of it".* O'Carolan's family were exiles from County Meath living in County Roscommon. When the O'Conors resided at Kilmactranny, just three miles from the Roscommon border, the two families had been neighbours in exile.

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[119] In fact, this man was a priest, who went under the title of 'Mr' because of the Penal Laws.

[120] *Ibid.*, p. 169. This description could have been taken from Caesar's account of subjects discussed by Druids in Gaul. See M Hadas (trans.), *The Gallic War and Other Writings of Julius Caesar* (Toronto, 1957).

[121] *Ibid.*, p. 169, quoting from a letter to Dr Carpenter.

[122] D Ó Catháin, *op. cit.*, p. 141.

Revd O'Conor may have been referring specifically to aspects of Bardic education that were imparted to just a few exceptional students, and especially so in Penal times, when the imparting and absorption of such knowledge, such as the esoteric secrets of the ancient Druids and *filidh* (Bardic poets) would have been fraught with extreme danger. That a man such as O'Carolan would have been the custodian and teacher of such covert knowledge is entirely credible; Donal O'Sullivan[123] gives us several indications that this could be the case.

Turlough O'Carolan was not only a harpist, he was also a poet. When he became blind, having lost his sight in his youth as a result of smallpox, he was supported financially by the McDermott Roe family, specifically to learn the art of the harp.[124] O'Sullivan provides an account, from the writings of Edward O'Reilly, regarding some of O'Carolan's mystical experiences:

"O'Carolan in his boyish days never discovered any taste for musick, nor any propensity to follow the idle trade. He had for some time been deprived of his sight before 'the wild harp rang to his adventurous hand' or that 'he felt the mystic powers that in blest numbers dwell'. But though his application to poetry and musick did not commence until he was full grown, O'Carolan after the loss of his sight used to prevail on some of his family or neighbours to lead him every fine day to the top of a moat or rath, at a still distance from his father's house, which he was in the habit of frequenting at every opportunity that offered before it had pleased God to deprive him of his vision. Here he commonly lay for hours stretched before the sun and was often observed to suddenly start up in an ecstasy. In one of these raptures he called on the boy that then attended him to lead him home with haste. As soon as ever he entered his house he called for his harp, and having suffered

[123] See below.

[124] In 1541 Henry VIII declared himself King of Ireland and in 1553, in an effort to make Irish people conform to the laws and culture of England, he ordered the suppression of virtually all musical activity (with the exception of pipers to accompany his army) and the destruction of all musical instruments. His daughter Elizabeth I deemed it prudent, shortly before she died in 1603, to issue a proclamation to *"Hang all the harpers where found and burn the instruments"*. According to Sean Williams, *"One by one, the upper class bards who had been such an important part of Gaelic Irish life were killed. Some of them escaped by going 'underground' with their talents, and a few harpers were left to carry on the tradition, but nowhere near the numbers that had existed before"*. Source: S Williams, *Focus: Irish Traditional Music* (New York and Oxford, 2010), p. 53.

his fingers to wander for some time confusedly over the strings he at length commenced composing . . .".[125]

The inspiration for O'Carolan's compositions was said to have come from his interaction with *na duine maith*, the good people, or fairy people:[126]

"To all who know anything of the popular opinions of the Irish it will not be surprising when they are told that this sudden and unexpected effusion of our Bard was owing to the inspiration of the 'queen of the good people' or fairies . . . who held her Court in the interior of this rath . . . It is confidently asserted that O'Carolan once related the vision he beheld on this occasion but was so overcome with terror that he made a particular request of his friends never again to question him on the subject and he never could be prevailed upon to repeat a second time what he had witnessed while he had been amongst 'the good people' ".[127]

O'Sullivan also tells us that O'Carolan once went on a pilgrimage to St Patrick's purgatory at Lough Derg in County Donegal. While this remains a popular pilgrimage site, and supposedly dates from the time of St Patrick, the modern pilgrimage is different to the one that O'Carolan would have made. At that time, the object of the pilgrimage was to spend three days and nights in a dark and secluded cave on the island,[128] a practice subsequently banned by the Catholic Church on whose orders the cave was filled in. It is believed that the intended spiritual objective was what would, nowadays, be called an 'out of body experience'. This was one of the practices taught to aspiring *filidh (poets)* within the druidic system and, later, the early Celtic Church.

The association of Irish music, especially harp music, with the otherworld is an important theme in Celtic mythology and sagas. Karen Ralls-MacLeod informs us that while musicians, or *oirfideadh*, were not of the same exalted social status as poets, or *filidh,* in ancient Irish society, they were nevertheless a numerous and honourable class, with the lines between exceptional *filidh* and exceptional harpers often blurring:

". . . someone of the highest grade of file (poet) was also considered to be a kind of poetic prophet, that is, an exceptional example of a supernaturally gifted individual of the artistic elite. This is not

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[125] E O'Reilly, *Mundey-O'Reilly MS.,* in *Carolaniana or Miscellaneous Notices Anecdoted and Observations relating to Turlough O'Carolan the celebrated Irish Bard and of his Patrons and Times*, pp. 109-10, cited in D O'Sullivan, *op. cit.,* p. 47.

[126] See Chapter 1 for references to the Tuatha De Danann.

[127] D O Sullivan, *op. cit.,* p. 47.

[128] *Ibid.,* p. 47.

unlike one of the especially gifted master harpers, who was also considered to be a type of intermediary between the Otherworld and everyday, mundane reality . . . the sui cruitirechta, a master harper, was held in high esteem, and the harp itself was placed above all other musical instruments in early Ireland. The sui cruitirechta also had the special privilege of entertaining kings and nobles on a regular basis".[129]

And it is certain that the harp tradition, and its powerful music, was taken by the Irish Christian missionary monks to Europe in the middle ages.[130]

The time-honoured oral tradition of transmission of sacred learning, from one person to another, within a strict system of spiritual training, appears to have been preserved and was in operation at the time of the worst excesses of the Penal Laws. It also appears, based on indicators to be gleaned from their lives, that Turlough O'Carolan and Charles O'Conor, were most probably eighteenth-century heirs and custodians of this sacral Gaelic heritage.[131]

Charles O'Conor's education, then, was carefully planned, chosen and delivered, probably by conservators of the Gaelic tradition inside the Catholic monastic orders based on the Continent, such as the Franciscans, in order to equip him with the social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual skills required for the next phase of his life, which was to locate, acquire, preserve and translate the remaining wealth of Ireland's manuscript tradition.

O'Conor's Antiquarian Work

Charles O'Conor's early work lay mostly in collecting, copying and translating ancient Irish manuscripts. Using the knowledge he had acquired throughout his education, O'Conor was able to engage with those members of the 'new Anglo-Irish' Protestant population who were intent on forging for themselves an acceptable and honourable Irish aspect to their identity, one not associated with Catholicism, that most feared and proscribed religion.

Such a history, and such an identity, was to be found in the ancient history of Ireland, as preserved in the ancient manuscripts. O'Conor's royal lineage, his knowledge of the Irish language and his skill in translating, as well as his patience and toleration, rendered him

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[129] K Ralls-MacLeod, *Music and the Celtic Otherworld from Ireland to Iona* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 27.

[130] *Ibid., p. 54.*

[131] See, for example, a statement made by Carolan that, *"I think that when I am among the O'Conors the harp has the old sound in it,"* quoted in Revd C O'Conor, *op. cit.,* p. 164.

perfectly placed to unlock the secrets of the manuscripts and cross over the normally strict demarcation lines between Protestant and Catholic social and intellectual intercourse in the eighteenth century. It also allowed several other Catholic antiquarians to become involved in this 'new Anglo-Irish' search for an acceptable identity.

O'Conor's version of the origin theory was in keeping with the Gaelic tradition as set out in the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann*, *The Book of Invasions of Ireland*, with its links to the Phoenicians, who were said to have developed one of the earliest written cultures, and a written alphabet which pre-dated that of Greece. These pre-Milesian invaders of Ireland, said to have entered Ireland via Britain, were described by O'Conor as primitive, hunting-based, northern Celts, much inferior to the Milesian Gaels (or Scots[132]), the cultured southern Celts.

Charles used his knowledge of the contents of the ancient manuscripts to produce, among other works, two original volumes on the history of Ireland. [133] [134]

His first book described the literate culture of pre-Christian Ireland, which, he claimed:

"developed without reference to classical Greece or Rome, and, by implication, flourished at a time when Britain was a site of benighted ignorance, before the arrival of the Romans: Descended from the most humane and knowing Nation of all the old Celts, they imported, very early, the Elements of Letters and Arts into Ireland: Here they improved those elements into Systems of Government and Philosophy, which their undisturbed State from foreign ambition left them at full Liberty to cultivate, through a long succession of ages".[135]

In both books he forcibly argued against the Establishment–held view that the Irish were an uncivilised, savage race, where learning did not exist before the coming of Christianity and, later, the Anglo-Normans of the twelfth century. On the contrary, O'Conor provided evidence of an early high culture, a parliament, a constitution, a sophisticated legal system,

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[132] 'Scots' in this context means 'Irish', Scotia being one of the old names for Ireland.
[133] C O'Conor, *Dissertations on the Antient History of Ireland; wherein an Account is given of the Origine, Government, Letters, Sciences, Religion, Manners and Customs, of the antient inhabitants* (Dublin, 1753).
[134] C O'Conor, *Dissertations on the History of Ireland, to which is subjoined A Dissertation on the Irish Colonies established in Britain, with some remarks on Mr Mac Pherson's translation of Fingal and Temora* (Dublin, 1766).
[135] C O'Halloran, *Golden Ages and Barbarous Nations*, *Antiquarian Debate and Cultural Politics in Ireland c. 1750-1800* (Cork, 2004) p. 24, quoting from C O'Conor, *Dissertations on the Antient History of Ireland* (Dublin, 1753).

a venerated learned class, and a kingship that incorporated leadership, based on achievement and ability as well as hereditary royal birth.

O'Conor's first book established him as one of the most important scholars in Ireland and opened the door for others to follow in his footsteps. However, his research findings of an advanced ancient Irish society and culture, based heavily on the Milesian history set out in the *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann*, or *Book of Invasions of Ireland*, were not acceptable to all those of a Protestant persuasion, and they were subject to much critical opposition. The argument that the Irish were an ignorant, uncivilised race had, for centuries, been a convenient one, for it justified the oppression of the Irish by the English, under the pretence of attempting to civilise them. To have that justification undermined, and shown to be false, seriously threatened to expose the real objectives of the English colonisers.

Catholics, and those sympathetic, were not slow to exploit this forgotten evidence,[136] as well as the remembered history of massive Gaelic land confiscations, to disprove the lie that the Gaelic Irish had been a barbarous race; and to seize the opportunity to discuss and expose the real reasons behind the oppression of Catholics under the Penal Laws.

One person who was much influenced by O'Conor was Charles Vallancey (1731-1812), an Irishman of Huguenot descent. As part of his army duties, Vallancey had travelled around Ireland on survey work and had become interested in its language and archaeology. He hired an Irish tutor, Muiris Ó Gormáin, and started corresponding with O'Conor in 1771. By 1772 he had been instrumental in having the Royal Dublin Society set up its Committee of Antiquarians to investigate Ireland's ancient arts, literature and antiquities. Membership of the Society included the elite of Anglo-Irish society, but it was Vallancey, as one of the Committee's secretaries, who encouraged the Committee to elicit the support and cooperation of O'Conor and, in 1773, the latter's election as an honorary member. Among the aims of the Society was the collection and publication of ancient manuscripts.

The Committee of Antiquarians petered out by 1775, but a few years later the Hibernian Antiquarian Society (1779-83), under the control of Vallancey and others, was established. However, major differences arose between the members, with Edward Ledwich (an Irish

[136] It must be remembered that the manuscripts that Charles was translating, along with many others, had, for centuries, been banned, destroyed, taken out of the country, or hidden for safety and subsequently forgotten about. The English monarchs and rulers, from Henry VIII on, were in no doubt about the potential threat they posed to their power. Possession of them, along with the wearing of Gaelic clothes, the enjoyment of Gaelic customs and the playing Gaelic music had been repressed and outlawed for centuries.

historian and Church of Ireland clergyman) reiterating the view that the ancient Irish were barbarians and O'Conor and Vallancey taking exception to this description. As Ó Catháin states: *"When Ledwich in an essay on 'the History and Antiquities of Irishtown and Kilkenny' said that the Irish had been barbarians until the Vikings and the Normans had civilised them, and . . . accused those who held the opposing viewpoint of 'eccentric wanderings', and 'incredible fiction', there were strong rumblings in the other camp".*[137]

Dr Carpenter, the Archbishop of Dublin, wrote to his friend and fellow Catholic, O'Conor, complaining that Ledwich had *"declared open war against our ancient documents".*[138] Both O'Conor and Vallancey then engaged in critical debate with Ledwich in succeeding articles of *De Collectanae de Rebus Hibernicis* until Vallancey, in control of that publication, refused to allow Ledwich to use it to propagate his theories. Ó Catháin describes the heated debate in this way, "*The battle continued in subsequent issues . . . until in the June 1783 issue Vallancey described Ledwich as 'a man who enjoys such extraordinary abilities, as to be able, to explain the most remote antiquities of a very ancient people without understanding a word of its language . . .'* and continues, *'if our worthy member should think it proper to proceed in ironical controversy, it is to be wished, he will find some other channel and some other title, to convey his works to the eye of the public, than Collectanae de Rebus Hibernicis' ".* [139]

As a later commentator, Walter Love, observed, *"Ledwich's view of ancient Ireland. . . was slanted towards England and Protestantism; Vallencey's was calculated to appeal to the native Irish and Catholicism".*[140] Ledwich revealed the important significance, and possible consequences, of this debate, when he claimed the Irish were invaded and populated from the North of Europe, with the implication that the native Irish were 'barbarous'. But Vallancey claimed, through his study of language, that the Phoenicians had come to Ireland, and from them the Irish had first received arts and letters; the ancient Irish had, therefore, been a refined and sophisticated people.

"*But Ledwich's theory allowed no such civilisation to have existed. It also meant that the traditional history in Irish literature would not do; for traditional history provided the basic evidence from which the picture of ancient splendour was drawn . . . [a]nd if the traditional history were wholly*

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[137] D Ó Catháin, *Charles O'Conor of Belanagare: Antiquary and Irish Scholar,* in *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. 119 (1989) p. 155.

[138] W Love, *The Hibernian Antiquarian Society: A Forgotten Predecessor to the Royal Irish Academy*, in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review,* vol. 51, no. 203 (Autumn, 1962), pp. 423-424.

[139] D Ó Catháin, *op. cit.,* p. 156.

[140] W Love, *op. cit.,* p. 423.

false, then Irish authors – and most drastic, the old Irish manuscripts, of which historians like Vallancey and O'Conor made a great deal – were valueless".[141]

Other antiquarian writers and historians came to support O'Conor and Vallencey's arguments over the following years, including Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), the renowned English writer, critic, poet and playwright – and an Anglican. British theories of a barbarian Irish race were dealt a further heavy blow by O'Conor in his rewrite of his second book. Prior to its publication, a Scotsman, James Macpherson, had gained an international reputation when he published translations, supposedly from Scottish manuscripts dating back to the third century, of poems concerning the ancient Gaelic hero Ossian, son of Fingal. O'Conor, criticising the work in terms of historical chronology and language inaccuracy, showed up the translations as fraudulent – criticisms that Macpherson was unable to defend. Other writers made similar accusations. Although claiming to be of Scottish Gaelic origin, the translations were accused of showing clear influence of the Bible, Homer and John Milton.

It is widely accepted now that Macpherson had invented, rather than translated, the work. His output, mixing Irish Fenian and Ulster legends, falsely claimed that the Irish heroes concerned were Scottish, not Irish. Obviously, if his false narrative had been accepted, he would have severely damaged Irish antiquarians' arguments that Irish manuscripts, dating back to the ninth and tenth centuries, based on the oral transmission of accounts that were many hundreds of years older, showed evidence of a much earlier Irish literary tradition.

Another prominent Catholic antiquarian was Sylvester O'Halloran, who had returned to Ireland from the Continent where he had gained his medical training. Such men as he brought back news and intellectual ideas that were circulating in Europe. O'Halloran wrote an *Introduction to the Study of the History and Antiquities of Ireland* (1772). But he was more of an enthusiast than a strict historian, and his follow up work, *The General History of Ireland*, (1778) so annoyed O'Conor that he stopped including him in his circle of academic friends.

According to SJ Connolly, *"Despite his shortcomings, O'Halloran's work is important to any discussion of Irish Catholic antiquarian writing in this period, because it shows the ways that new*

[141] *Ibid.*, p. 423.

interpretations of history and new conceptions of identity emerged alongside more traditional narratives . . .".[142]

Moreover, O'Halloran had a connection to Bardic Ireland, having been educated in hedge schools, as well as by his uncle Seán Clárach MacDomhnaill, the renowned Gaelic poet and Jacobite. He had trained as an eye surgeon in London and Paris and displayed a Continental Enlightenment[143] aspect to his writings. He attempted to unite Catholics and Protestants by writing a non-sectarian history of Ireland, thus becoming a forerunner of the writings of Wolfe Tone, some twenty years later.

Charles O'Conor, despite the Jacobite legacy of his immediate forebears, did not challenge the legitimacy of the reigns of Britain's latest monarchs, i.e. the Hanoverians George II (1727– 760) and George III (1760–1820), and had effectively abandoned the Jacobite cause, as a practical reality facing those fighting to improve the lot of Catholics. The failed Rising of the last of the royal Stuart dynasty, Bonnie Prince Charlie, in Scotland and England in 1746, had been *'the last flicker of a candle that had been going out for sixty years'.* O'Halloran went further, claiming that George III had Scottish and Irish blood, being a descendant of James I and was, therefore, a legitimate heir.

Charles O'Conor's Campaign Work against the Penal Laws

Another of O'Conor's major areas of activity, from 1749 to 1771, was his authorship of pamphlets arguing for the repeal of the Penal Laws.[144] Although he had been accepted into Protestant intellectual and literary society because of his translation work, this other activity, being openly critical of the Penal Laws and advocating their repeal, would not have been tolerated by his Protestant associates and would have threatened his acceptance in their society. And so, he wrote anonymously, giving the impression that a liberal Protestant was the author, of whom there were several at that time, though the punishment for such Catholic and Protestant authors differed widely.

In 1756, O'Conor founded the Catholic Committee, with the intention of finding ways to improve the position of Catholics, in particular by the abolition of the Penal Laws. By 1760

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[142] SJ Connolly, *Divided Kingdom: Ireland, 1630-1800, 2nd ed.* (Dublin, 2001), p. 297, quoted in P Gibbons, *Emerging Ireland: Antiquarian Writing and the Moulding of Irish Catholic Identity in the 18th Century* (College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, 2015), p. 46.

[143] The Enlightenment was a period of cultural, philosophical and intellectual change, based on the supremacy of reason, that took place in several countries of the Continent during the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, and that ended at the time of the French Revolution.

[144] This was done in collaboration with his friend John Curry, a Dublin doctor and historian.

every county had a Committee. Many of Penal Law restrictions were abolished over the coming years. After death of the Old Pretender[145] in 1766, Catholics were no longer seen as a threat, especially when the Vatican recognised the Hanoverian Kings.

The Estate at Belanagare

Around this time Charles had become head of the household, on the death of his father Denis. The estate at Belanagare had increased from its original size and was now some 900 acres,[146] with a similar area owned by his kinsman, Dominick O'Conor Don, at the nearby Clonalis estate. But, another attack, arising directly from the Penal Laws, was to strike at the heart of the family and its property after the death of Denis. Charles' youngest brother, Hugh, commenced a legal action against Charles, seeking to oust him from the land to which Hugh, as a Catholic turned Protestant, claimed entitlement. The case was eventually settled out of Court by a monetary payment to Hugh, thereby incurring new encumbrances on the land.[147]

Charles remained head of the O'Connor estate at Belanagare, from where he continued his literary work until 1760. Then, at the age of 50, he handed over the running of the estate and household to his son Denis (who had recently married) so that he, Charles, could spend the rest of his days living in a small hermitage that he had built for himself at the edge of the estate. There he continued his work of translating and preserving manuscripts. Some years later, after his death in 1791, the house and hermitage were in ruins, the battle of maintaining all the trappings of a Gelic household, in an anti-Gaelic environment, having finally been lost.

Charles O'Connor's Legacy

For an aware observer of the Bardic culture into which Charles O'Conor was born and educated, there is a reasonable assumption to be made that he considered himself *fá geasa*,

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[145] James Francis Edward Stuart (1688-1766), son of James II. The attempt of his own son, Charles Edward Stuart, the Young Pretender (Bonnie Prince Charlie), to retake the Scottish and English thrones, ended when he was defeated at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. He died a broken man in Rome in 1766.

[146] Despite the buying of land by Catholics being proscribed under the Penal Laws, Charles had managed to secretly add to the estate's Court-awarded 700 acres over the years.

[147] Charles wrote contemporaneously about this latest struggle: *"After the storm in 1680, my poor father was finally cast on the shore on a broken plank. I have succeeded to him. This is the plank from which it is now hoped I may be driven by a Penal Law. I struggle to keep my hold; and if I am left nothing to inherit but the religion and misfortunes of a family long on the decline, the victim is prepared for the sacrifice, resignedly indeed, though not willingly".* (Source: C O'Conor, *Gaelic Journal*, vol. IX (Jul., 1898), pp. 211-212, cited in D O'Sullivan, *op. cit.,* p. 43.

under injunction, an obligation imposed by someone within the Bardic tradition with the necessary moral and spiritual authority to do so. Such an injunction would have been entirely in keeping with Charles' status and the needs of the times in which he was living. The evidence strongly suggests that O'Conor was chosen, trained and educated (at grave risk to himself and his teachers) to be the keeper of the Gaelic flame and to work towards the restoration of Gaelic culture in Ireland – a long-term, and wide-ranging goal, which included working towards the repeal of the Penal Laws, and the promotion and restoration of Gaelic learning and history through manuscript location, preservation and translation.

The first was a dangerous, difficult and, necessarily, covert activity. The second was equally difficult, requiring specific educational achievements and virtues of character. Charles accomplished his objectives by practising tolerance and patience — and no small degree of cunning,[148] given his double life as an anonymous pamphleteer against the Penal Laws — in his dealings with Anglo-Irish establishment figures in the Antiquarian Movement. Not alone did he socialise easily with them, he excelled in his field of study, to the extent that they sought him out to help with their own projects.

"It would be surprising if the custodians of the mystical tradition of the Gaelic order, the same wisdom of the Druids and the filidh of former times, knowing the tradition to be under attack and seriously in decline, had not set up a system of preservation . . . perhaps believing that a time would come when it would again flourish. It would also be surprising if those custodians did not base themselves on the Continent, a place safe from English attack, a place with which they were already familiar and from where they could formulate their plans for restoring Gaelic culture, learning and wisdom to their Irish people and those further afield.

"Given the vulnerability in Ireland of the written medium that had previously been relied on for this transmission (as evidenced by the sacking of the monasteries and the destruction and outlawing of unnumerable manuscripts), the alternative, time-honoured oral tradition of transmission of learning, from one person to another, within a strict system of spiritual training, appears to have been preserved and was in operation at the time of the worst excesses of the Penal Laws. It also appears, based on indicators to be gleaned from their lives, that Turlough O'Carolan and Charles O'Conor, were probably eighteenth-century heirs and custodians of this sacral Gaelic heritage."[149]

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[148] Presumably, these are qualities that Charles would have had to perfect as part of his spiritual training.

[149] P Herron Ó Síodhacháin, *op. cit.,* p. 270.

Charles O'Conor's life and work shows that – despite the seventeenth-century attacks on Gaelic Ireland – the centuries-old druidic system, did not die but, of necessity, became 'sub rosa'. That Charles O'Connor obtained his Bardic education, and carried out his defiant work under the noses (and even with the help of) the class which had ousted his family from their home, and the Irish people from their land, while they ironically sought to move beyond the true history of their presence in Ireland in order to find one that cast them in a more acceptable light, demonstrates not only the favoured Gaelic technique of keeping the esoteric 'hidden in plain sight', but also the daring and bravery of the exiled Irish Celts in conceiving and successfully implementing such a plan.

Another aspect of O'Conor's legacy, often overlooked, was his success in preserving the ancient way of Gaelic life within his own estate, which he ran as a successful farm. He secretly acquired an increasing amount of land, employed several farm hands and servants, and continued with the Gaelic tradition of hospitality and patronage of the arts, especially poetry and music. He also refused to abandon his religion, reluctantly or otherwise, in favour of the established Anglican Church, but rather continued to practise the Catholic religion and also helped others to do so. To accomplish this goal, he broke many of the Penal Laws, thus subjecting himself, and those he helped and protected, to the possibility of prosecution. Despite being a member of the persecuted and despised Catholic Church, he showed that Catholics could be accepted into polite society.

In providing proof of a Milesian foundation for Ireland's religion, literary culture and civil society, he showed how Ireland's culture pre-dated the coming of Christianity in the fifth century and the invasion of the Norman English in the twelfth. His Protestant counterparts in the antiquarian world were heartened to know that the form of Christianity practised in Ireland, before and for centuries after St Patrick's arrival, had not been imposed by Rome, but rather derived from a distinctly Celtic philosophy, which retained many of the beliefs and practices of the ancient Celts.

In addition, O'Conor's work (along with Vallencey's and O'Halloran's) was the first concerted push–back, on an intellectual level, against the English propaganda that had for centuries dominated accepted British, European and international views regarding the relationship between England and Ireland.

O'Conor's pamphleteering work, in attempting to have the Penal Laws reformed, bore fruit in his later life, with the passing of many Acts of the British and Irish parliaments repealing or restricting the Penal Laws.

Finally, and remarkably, Charles O'Conor's considerable achievements, such as breaking down the barriers between Protestants and Catholics (at least at the level of high literary and educational society); convincing many, at home and further afield, of his proof that Ireland had never been a backward or barbarous race before its colonisation by the English; highlighting the injustice of the Penal Laws against Catholics and setting up structures to help campaign for their repeal, all came about without the use of physical force or the loss of life.

It is an observation of this book that true and lasting freedom from oppression in Ireland will finally come about by the adoption of a two-pronged approach: one dealing with physical, or military, resistance; the other dealing with the knowledge, preservation, experience – and ultimately celebration – of Ireland's rich Gaelic culture, including its spiritual legacy. The Tudor Kings and Queens (including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I) understood this very well, which explains their determination to eliminate Gaelic culture, in all its forms, from Ireland. We have seen that Hugh O'Neill did not, as far as we are aware, prioritise both strands, the military and the cultural, in his campaigns. He concentrated solely on the military. And although he was a formidable opponent of superior English military might, and was the winner of many battles, ultimately he did not win the final war. We have also seen that Charles O'Conor, while concentrating on the cultural dimension of Irish resistance against English oppression, made little or no incursion against England's military grip on Ireland during the eighteenth century. This observation is not to deny the enormously important contribution both men made to Irish resistance against English oppression.

In the modern idiom, the fight for Irish freedom has proved itself to be a marathon, not a sprint. And, to continue with the sporting metaphor, perhaps it could also be likened to a relay, with prominent individuals in succeeding generations and centuries accepting the torch of Gaelic resistance from their predecessors, giving their lives' work (and often their lives) to the Gaelic cause and passing on the flame to the next generation. Gradually, as will be shown later in this book, those involved in Irish resistance against England in later centuries, came to fully realise that a cultural revolution would be just as important as a military one in Ireland's quest for freedom.

Chapter Four

Betsy Grey (c. 1778-1798)

AN INTERESTING, EXTREMELY significant, but ultimately unsuccessful, military attempt to overthrow British rule in Ireland took place at the very end of the eighteenth century. This attempt was unusual for many reasons, not least of which was that Catholics and Protestants joined forces against their common enemy, England: the Protestants concerned being Ulster New Light Presbyterians of Scottish descent.

It will be remembered from the previous Chapter that one of the conditions imposed on intending settlers from England during the Ulster Plantation was that they, and the tenants they brought with them to Ireland, had to be Anglicans, i.e. members of the Church of England. The Reformation in England had been a 'top down' one, with Henry VIII breaking from the Catholic Church and setting up the Church of England, as a result of the Vatican refusing to grant him a divorce and so allow him to marry Ann Boleyn. Most of the English population had not opposed this change in their established religion from Catholicism to Anglicanism; and the rejection of existing religious dogma had not played a significant part in the English reformation. Indeed, much of the new Anglican Church doctrine and services remained very similar to that of Catholicism.

On the other hand, most Scottish settlers into Ulster practised a different form of Protestantism, *viz* Presbyterianism, reflecting the Reformation that had taken place in Scotland. The established Scottish Church underwent many debates and schisms, based on theological and organisational differences and, over time, Presbyterianism had evolved as a breakaway church from the established Church of Scotland, which remained Episcopalian and Anglican. In addition, Ulster Presbyterians remained closely associated with their foundation church in Scotland, and with political events happening there.

Loyalty to the Scottish rather than the English Crown,[150] an initial lack of enthusiasm for the Ulster plantation, as well as language and religious differences, meant that the Presbyterian Scots had to be persuaded and assured by James I of England (James VI of Scotland) that the intended settlement in Ulster would be a joint venture between both countries. They were unaware of England's ulterior motive for that country's determination to involve Scotland in the Ulster Plantation, which was to thwart the practice of the Irish hiring Scottish mercenaries in their military campaigns against England.

As we also saw in the previous Chapter, the seventeenth century had seen many wars between the three countries, Ireland, Scotland and England, with no lasting unity of purpose or alliance between any of them. In particular, the Scots proved to be anything but loyal to England's political aims and objectives. One commentator has observed that, *"The Presbyterian religion conditioned a state of mind different from that of other Irish Protestants, for its rejection of bishops and respect for the opinions of the meeting house gave Ulster Protestants a radical attitude to politics ahead of their times, and even a potentially republican as opposed to a monarchical outlook".*[151]

Having agreed to join forces with England in the Ulster Plantation, by the 1700s those Scottish Planters and their tenants living in Ireland found themselves persecuted, and discriminated against, by many of the same Penal Laws proscribing Irish Catholics' rights and freedoms. For although the political situation in Ireland was controlled by a Protestant ascendancy in the Irish parliament, those powerful Protestants were Anglicans. They were members of the Church of Ireland, were loyal to the English parliament, and remained unaffected by the Penal Laws.

The American War of Independence (1775-1783)

Nevertheless, despite being hampered by restrictions and Penal Laws, Presbyterians in some parts of Ulster were beginning to succeed in the emerging international trade market. Additionally, many of them took inspiration from Britain's other colony, North America, which, like Ireland, was under the control of the English parliament. When Americans

[150] The Union of Crowns between Scotland and England took place in 1603, with the Union of Parliaments taking place a century later, in 1707.

[151] R Kee, *The Green Flag:* [1]: The Most Distressful Country (London, 1976), p. 97, quoted in J McCann, *The Northern Ireland Liberal Presbyterians 1770-1830,* The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies, vol. 21, no. 1 (Jul., 1995), pp. 96-114.)

decided to revolt to gain independence from Britain, many of those involved were Ulster Presbyterian émigrés.[152]

True to form, the Irish parliament supported the English side in the American War of Independence and sent troops to fight on England's behalf. By 1778-79, deprived of home defences in the face of likely attack from France and Spain (both of which countries supported America), Ulster Protestants began to arm themselves and formed a Volunteer movement. Reacting in fear of what might be unleashed, and to appease those Ulster Presbyterians, the English parliament lifted trade restrictions in Ireland. Around this time too, again as we saw in the previous Chapter, some of the Penal Laws were relaxed or abolished.

Encouraged by this response, the Volunteers demanded further reforms of Ireland's economic system and identified the Irish parliament as the main source of their grievances. They demanded the abolition of the English parliament's right to refuse the Irish parliament the ability to introduce, and legislate for, Bills of its own choosing, as well the abolition of the right of the English parliament to legislate for Ireland. These reforms, if adopted, would involve the abolition of Poynings' Law (enacted in 1494) as well as the 1720 Declaratory Act.

Following a change of government in England, severe losses in America and the formation of a delegate convention of the Ulster Volunteer movement at Dungannon in 1782 that called for Irish independence, the new Whig government in England did indeed abolish the Declaratory Act, so denying the parliament in London the right to legislate for Ireland; and also denied the House of Lords the right to decide appeals from Irish Law Court cases. In doing so, they had conceded two of the major demands of the Volunteers. In addition, Poynings' Law was amended to allow the Irish parliament more control over what Bills could be discussed and brought into law.

However, the King's representative in Ireland, the Lord Lieutenant, remained in control of the Irish government. New demands by the Volunteers, for more change and more independence in carrying out the affairs of the Irish government, coincided with the war in America having been lost and British troops returning home, including to Ulster. No longer needing the Volunteer force, the English House of Commons rejected their latest

[152] It has been estimated that almost 200,000 Presbyterians emigrated from Ulster to North America between 1717 and 1775. See: DH Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (USA, 1989), p. 606.

demands. As well as that, since the Volunteers opposed violence as a means of gaining their demands, and had not established any alternative, successful, non-violent means of obtaining them, their reform movement stalled.

The French Revolution (1789-1799)

In France the old era, where the individual had no right to elect the government and had no defence against abuse of power and privilege by the government, was swept away, and a new, democratic and egalitarian system put in its place. Ireland's links with France were historically strong and Irish news reports kept the Irish well informed of what was happening in France. But despite legislative freedoms, Ireland's political leaders (led by Henry Grattan) were still claiming Britain and Ireland's interests to be as one.

Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798)

Theobald Wolfe Tone, a Protestant lawyer living in Dublin, argued that Ireland had no quarrel with Spain and should not support colonisation. He published his views in 1791, in a publication entitled *"An Argument on behalf of the Catholics of Ireland"*. This publication displayed a difference of opinion between Irish patriots such as Henry Grattan and Henry Flood, who hoped to gain more parliamentary concessions from the English government, and those agreeing with Tone, who were coming to realise that only complete independence from England would allow them to achieve their goals. It was argued that to achieve such independence, the two biggest under-privileged groups, the Catholics and the Protestant radicals, would have to cooperate.

Tone was also instrumental in having the Catholic Relief Act of 1793 passed. This statute removed most of the restrictions of the Penal Laws, allowed Catholics to vote, to attend university and to obtain degrees.[153] However, Catholics were still not entitled to enter parliament or Crown offices.

Meanwhile, in Ulster, Presbyterians were coming to the same conclusions as Tone. Belfast was rapidly growing into a strong and successful economic town, with the linen trade and the shipyards bringing economic growth, and voluntary organisations being set up to alleviate the plight of the poor. According to one commentator, *"The typical Belfastman of the period, a Presbyterian businessman, was bound to be critical of the ruling world of the*

[153] Trinity College Dublin allowed Roman Catholics to enrol there from 1794. However, between 1871 and 1970, the Catholic Church compelled any of its members seeking to enrol at Trinity College to seek permission from the Church first.

episcopalian landlords and to suspect that his economic interests were being ignored".[154] In 1784, the Synod of Ulster had passed a resolution calling for the abolition of all discrimination, against Presbyterians and Catholics alike. In addition, Catholics were permitted to join the Volunteers.

In 1791, Tone was invited to discussions in Belfast by William Drennan, a Presbyterian doctor, who had studied medicine at Glasgow University. He had become influenced by the philosopher Francis Hutcheson, himself part of the Scottish Enlightenment movement, which rejected the restraints of Church and Crown in favour of the power of reason. This movement argued that an individual had the right, and a duty, to listen to their own conscience and to resist the unfair oppressions of the State.

The Society of the United Irishmen

At the meeting of Tone and Drennan, attended by Drennan's Presbyterian friends, it was proposed to set up an organisation to be called the Society of the United Irishmen, pledged to the equality of Protestant and Catholic representation in parliament. Accordingly, the Belfast Society of the United Irishmen was founded. One month later the Dublin Society of the same organisation came into being.

Initially limited to debating societies, the two organisations published pamphlets, manifestos and outlines for parliamentary reform. In 1793, they held a delegate convention in Dungannon, where support was pledged for reform of parliament, to be followed by other reforms to help trade, decrease taxes, abolish tithes and encourage primary education. At the same time the Catholic Committee was pressing the government to abolish the remainder of the Penal Laws.

But members of the Protestant ascendancy in Dublin were wary that if the Penal Laws were relaxed, this would inevitably lead to parliamentary reform, which in turn would lead to the demand for independence from Britain, something that they greatly feared. In Ulster, two opposing organisations, the Protestant Peep o' Day Boys and the Catholic Defenders, threatened to undermine unity there. Combined with opposition from Catholic clergy, north and south, many defections of both Protestants and Catholics took place.

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[154] RB McDowell, *The Protestant Nation (1775-1800)*, in TW Moody and FX Martin (eds.) *The Course of Irish History* (Cork, 1984), pp. 238-239.

However, the British government, facing a war with revolutionary France, prevailed upon the Irish government to grant some concessions, with the result that the Relief Act of 1793 was passed, allowing Catholics to vote and removing most of the other restrictions of the Penal Laws. At the same time, the Volunteers were outlawed and replaced by a militia, which would operate under government control. England also declared war on France. As one observer puts it, *"By concession and repression, authority was preparing to meet a time of crisis"*.[155]

The Society of the United Irishmen, however, did not disband. It moved from being a reformist movement into a revolutionary, oath-bound one, dedicated to the overthrow of the Kingdom of Ireland, and continued as an underground movement looking to revolutionary France for assistance in the form of an invasion of Ireland. But the movement was heavily infiltrated by English spies and informers. Several of its leaders fled the country. One of them, the Revd William Jackson, who had travelled from France to assess the situation in Ireland with a view to sending assistance, was betrayed to government forces, and was tried for treason. He committed suicide during the course of his trial.

Wolfe Tone was under government suspicion but was allowed to leave Ireland and did so in 1795, intending to travel to the United States. Before that, he had a meeting at the summit of Cave Hill, overlooking Belfast, with northern United Irishmen, including Thomas Russell (originally from Mallow, County Cork) and Henry Joy McCracken from Belfast, where they pledged to continue with their attempts to overthrow England's dominance and obtain independence for Ireland.

In 1796, still attempting to engage French help in the cause, Tone travelled to France and enlisted as an officer in the French army. Although preoccupied with the war with Britain, France did offer some limited assistance, hoping to invade Britain via Ireland, which was less protected than the British mainland. By the end of that year France had sent a fleet of 14,000 soldiers to Ireland. But winter storms caused much of the fleet to be scattered, with only a few reaching Bantry Bay, where the invasion plan was abandoned.

Nevertheless, the Irish government was panicked into setting up another military organisation, the Yeomanry, as well as imposing curfews, suspending the right of habeas corpus, and giving magistrates more powers, including one to search for arms. In

[155] *Ibid.,* p. 241.

addition, the oath of the United Irishmen was proscribed and punishable by death.[156] Rewards given by the government for information meant that informers were plentiful, with many leading members of the United Irishmen (as well as innocent people) being betrayed by them.

In 1797 there were isolated uprisings, such as those in Waterford and Wexford, and in Down and Antrim, but these were easily defeated by government forces. The government also had control of the major cities and strongholds of the United Irishmen, such as Dublin and Belfast.

Later that year, a small French fleet landed in Killala but the attack there, although supported by many of the United Irishmen, failed after a week. Another French flotilla, with Wolfe Tone (now a French officer) on board, landed shortly afterwards, in Lough Swilly. That expedition also failed. Tone was arrested, tried, found guilty and is alleged to have committed suicide before he could be executed.

William Orr

Also in 1797, an event of immense significance for the Ulster-based United Irishmen took place. William Orr, a Presbyterian member of the Society, was executed by government forces in October of that year. He had been falsely accused by a soldier, Hugh Wheatly, of administering the United Irishmen's oath to him. Orr was defended by John Philpot Curran, one of the most distinguished barristers of the day. His speech to the jury was eloquent and heartfelt, but to no avail. The jury found Orr guilty and he was sentenced to death. As was customary, he was entitled to address the Court at that point. The following is an exact account of what he said:

"My friends and fellow –countrymen, in the thirty-first year of my life I have been sentenced to die upon the gallows, and this sentence has been in pursuance of a verdict by twelve men who should have been indifferently and impartially chosen. How far they have been so, I leave to that country from which they have been chosen to determine; and how far they have discharged their duty, I leave to their God and to themselves. They have, in pronouncing their verdict, thought proper to recommend me as an object of human mercy. In return, I pray to God, if they have erred, to have mercy upon them. The judge who condemned me humanely shed tears in uttering my sentence. But whether he did wisely in so highly commending the wretched informer who swore away my

[156] The wording of the Oath is set out later in this Chapter.

life, I leave to his own cool reflection, solemnly assuring him and all the world, with my dying breath, that that informer was foresworn.

"The law under which I suffer is a severe one – may the makers and promotors of it be justified in the integrity of their motives, and the purity of their own lives! By that law I am stamped a felon, but my heart distains the imputation.

"My comfortable lot, and industrious course of life, best refute the charge of being an adventurer for plunder; but if to have loved my country – to have known its wrongs – to have felt the injuries of the persecuted and to have united with them and all other religious persuasions in the most orderly and least sanguinary means of procuring redress – if those be felonies – I am a felon, but not otherwise. Had my counsel (for whose honourable exertions I am indebted) prevailed in their motions to have me tried for high treason, rather than under the Insurrection Law, I should have been entitled to a full defence, and my actions would have been better vindicated; but that was refused, and I must now submit to what has passed.

"To the generous protection of my country I leave a beloved wife, who has been constant and true to me, and whose grief for my fate has already nearly occasioned her death. I have five living children, who have been my delight. May they love their country as I have done, and die for it if needful.

"Lastly, a false and ungenerous publication having appeared in a newspaper, stating alleged confessions of guilt on my part, and this striking at my reputation, which is dearer to me than life, I take this solemn method of contradicting the calumny. I was applied to by the High-Sheriff to make a confession of guilt, and by the Revd William Bristow, sovereign of Belfast, who used entreaties to that effect: this I peremptorily refused. If I thought myself guilty, I would freely confess it; but on the contrary, I glory in my innocence.

"I trust that all my virtuous countrymen will bear me in their kind remembrance, and continue true and faithful to each other, as I have been to all of them. With this last wish of my heart nothing doubting of the success of that cause for which I suffer, and hoping for God's merciful forgiveness of such offences as my frail nature may have at any time betrayed me into, I die in peace and charity with all mankind."[157]

On the day of his execution, the townspeople of Carrigfergus left the town deserted. The soldier who falsely accused Orr, Wheatly, later admitted in an affidavit sworn before a

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[157] D B Sullivan, *https://www.libraryireland/WilliamOrrSpeechesDock/index.php* (Speeches From the Dock, 1886).

magistrate that he had lied. He subsequently committed suicide. Two of the jury members swore that they had been induced to find William Orr guilty by being plied by drink; two others that they had been induced by threats of violence to do so. For years afterwards, the rallying cry of the United Irishmen was *"Remember Orr!"* out of respect for the Society's first innocent martyr.

Betsy Gray

It is time now to turn to the story of the remarkable young Ulsterwoman, Betsy Gray, to whose memory this Chapter is dedicated. Along with her companions, she sacrificed her life for the cause of the United Irishmen and left behind a legacy that shines a light not only on the unacclaimed role of women in campaigns of resistance in Ireland, but also on the power of cooperation, tolerance and respect for erstwhile religious enemies, when traditional antagonisms fail to be fuelled and stirred up by English propaganda.

As with so many women involved in the fight for Irish freedom, Betsy Gray has been somewhat ignored and forgotten by those writing Irish history. As a result, what little is known about her is scanty and non-contemporaneous. Nevertheless, one important source was written and published some ninety years after her death, *Betsy Gray or, Hearts of Down, A Tale of Ninety-Eight* by Wesley Guard Lyttle.[158] By interviewing descendants of the local people involved in her story, and by visiting locations where the main actions of the historical events of her story took place, the author has put together an interesting, albeit somewhat embellished and romanticised, account of Betsy Gray's life and death, as well as telling the story of the 1798 Rebellion in County Down. A synopsis of his account follows:

Betsy Gray was born at Granshaw in north County Down, close to Six–Road–Ends. At the time of the Rebellion in 1798, she lived with her widowed father, Hans, and brother George. Hans Gray was a comfortably well-off and well-respected farmer, who could afford to give his only daughter an education suitable for the young lady that she turned out to be. By 1798, as the author states, *"She had now reached her twentieth year, and was possessed of wondrous beauty, a beauty enriched and enhanced by a warm heart, an ardent*

[158] Published by Mourne Observer Ltd., Newcastle, Co. Down, Northern Ireland (1968). The Internet version referenced here is a reprint from the original.

temperament and lady-like accomplishments. Her beauty and her goodness formed a theme for every tongue wherever she went, and many a wealthy suitor sought her hand in marriage".[159]

The Gray house was often used for meetings of the local United Irishmen, and for the initiation of new members. One such meeting, in early 1798, is described in Lyttle's book, when Willie Boal, to whom Betsy had given her heart, and who would later fight and die alongside her and her brother George, was sworn into membership of the Society of United Irishmen.

At the meeting, which was attended by local men and women, including Betsy, her brother George, and some friends and neighbours, Boal was taken to a small private room for his initiation ceremony. He assured those few presiding at the ceremony (Colonel Bryson, George Dray and John Moore) that he was making the decision to join the Society of the United Irishmen of his own free will. He was then given a copy of the Bible and the Society's Rules and Oath. Pressing these to his breast, he repeated the wording of the Oath as follows:

"In the awful presence of God, I, William Boal, do voluntarily declare that I will persevere in endeavouring to form a brotherhood of affection among Irishmen of every religious persuasion; and that I will also persevere in my endeavours to obtain an equal, full and adequate representation of all the people of Ireland. I do further declare that neither hopes, fears, rewards, nor punishments shall ever induce me, directly or indirectly, to inform on, or give evidence against, any member or members of this or similar societies, for any act or expression of theirs done or made, collectively or individually in or out of this society, in pursuance of the spirit of this obligation".[160]

Boal was then instructed in how to recognise another member of the Society who might approach him. For example, if addressed with the remark, *"I know U"*, he should reply, *"I know N"*, and let the conversation proceed in this way until all of the letters of the word UNITED were spelled out. There were also questions and answers to learn, such as:

"Q: Are you straight?

A: I am.

Q: How straight?

A: As straight as a rush.

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[159] W Guard Lyttle, *op. cit.* p. 15.
[160] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

Q: Go on, then?

A: In truth, in trust, in unity and liberty.

Q: What have you got in your hand?

A: A green bough.

Q: Where did it first grow?

A: In America.

Q: Where did it bud?

A: In France.

Q: Where are you going to plant it?

A: In the Crown of Great Britain".[161]

With the initiation of the new member successfully completed, the small group returned to the main meeting room, where Boal was warmly congratulated by the other members present and refreshments offered all round.

The Betrayal of William Warwick

One night, shortly afterwards, at a party in the Gray household held to commemorate Betsy's late mother, the celebrations were dramatically interrupted by a messenger hurrying to the door, to tell the people there that the military were on their way to arrest one of their party, William Warwick.

William Warwick lived with his well-respected widowed mother on a small farm at Drumawhey, near Newtownards. He had lately finished his training in Belfast to become a Presbyterian Minister and was awaiting his first appointment. Although he was popular in the neighbourhood, that popularity aroused the jealousy of a local teacher and inn–keeper, James Dillon, a secret government informer against anyone in his community suspected of involvement with the United Irishmen. Dillon saw his opportunity to act against Warwick when he came upon a document, a partly coded dispatch in connection with the anticipated call to arms of the United Irishmen Rising. He recognised the handwriting as Warwick's and soon had him betrayed to the authorities in Newtownards.

[161] *Ibid.,* p. 40.

The soldiers based there, the York Fencibles, were making their way to arrest Warwick at Betsy Gray's house, when the gathering there was abruptly alerted to this danger.

They immediately found a hiding place for Warwick, where he remained safely hidden while the soldiers conducted their search. When they had gone, some of those present advised Warwick to leave the country immediately, but he believed he would be safe enough hiding in the Gray household, and in his mother's house nearby. This plan lasted well for several months until he was spotted in his mother's house by the wife of Dillon, the informer. Dillon relayed this information to the military who set out once more to arrest Warwick. This time, with the help of Dillon, they found their man and arrested him.

At his Court-martial in Newtownards, presided over by Lord Londonderry, Warwick was officially charged with having issued a treasonable document. Warwick admitted that the document concerned was written in his handwriting but swore he had been asked only to make a copy of it, not originate it. He refused to say who had asked him to do so. Although no further evidence was given against him, Warwick was found guilty. When asked if he had anything to say in his defence he responded in the following manner.

"Yes, my lord and gentlemen, I have . . . I have to ask, nay to demand, that my accusers all be brought before me. Is this the boasted justice of our country? Are we to be at the mercy of any unprincipled and mercenary scoundrel who chooses to traffic in human blood? Where is Dillon? Produce him! Let him say what evidence is against me. I have admitted that the document is in my handwriting, but I am not responsible for the framing of it. I did not dream that in making a copy from the original I was placing my life in peril, or erring in my loyalty to the King. I have no more to say!"[162]

Warwick was then asked again to give the names and addresses of all the people involved, on the assurance that his life would probably be spared if he did so. But he refused and the sentence of death was passed. He was temporarily reprieved and released from custody for some months, all the time guarded by two soldiers who were under orders to shoot him if he tried to escape.

But Warwick was subsequently re-incarcerated and informed that 15 October, 1798, was to be the day of his execution. On that day, he was allowed to receive visits from his friends, in order to say their good-byes, including from his fiancée Mary, Betsy Gray's

[162] *Ibid.*, p. 64.

dearest friend. When the dreaded hour came, he is said to have calmly stated the following:

" 'I do not complain. God's will must be done; but the vengeance of man is surely more terrible than even the visitations of the Almighty. Our Heavenly father is of long suffering and slow to anger; but man is sudden and furious in his revenge. To die is appalling, even under any circumstances, but to be separated from her with whom I had hoped to enjoy many years of love and happiness; to be dragged down to the grave thus early in life, and to leave her behind who is to me all that belongs to life itself. O, God! Support me in this terrible hour of my dark despair".[163]

Lyttle describes the scene at the gallows, where a severe thunder and lightning storm accompanied proceedings, and the assembled people were given a sign from Above, if one were needed, that Warwick was truly an innocent and exceptional man.

"The morning all along had been exceedingly wet. A gigantic mass of heavy thunder clouds gathered immediately over the heads of the party. The Revd Brydon has just finished his touching appeal to God, when a frightful peal of thunder burst right above the crowd, and all around seemed one sheet of fire. The stern troopers looked on each other in amazement, and all save the chief and the devoted Warwick trembled like the quivering leaves of the surrounding wood. How different were the feelings which produced that self-command in these two men! In Warwick, the power of religion and a heart of purity and innocence, bore him up even in the bitter hour of death. In Londonderry all his brutal nature was summoned up to stifle conscience. The storm continued unabated. The rain fell down in torrents; the lightening blazed more frightfully; the thunder shook the firmament as if a revolution were at hand; and in the midst of these convulsions of nature Warwick was sacrificed to appease unnatural vengeance. Just as he was in his last convulsive struggle, a small cloud that had detached itself from the heavy masses above descended as though it would alight on the head of the dying man. It opened, and, to the amazement of everyone present, a white dove was seen, with downward wing hovering immediately over the gallows tree. In another moment the cloud closed on the airy messenger and all was over with poor Warwick. Londonderry waved his sword, the ranks opened and spurring his horse he rode off at a gallop to Mountstewart, dismayed and disheartened."[164]

[163] *Ibid.,* p. 150.
[164] *Ibid.,* p. 151.

The Rebellion in Ulster

By May 1798, the south of the country had risen, but the north was still waiting for the call. Lyttle asks, and astutely answers, the question as to why the government did not stop the Rebellion from going ahead:

"Be it here remarked that the government, fully informed of every movement of the people, having in their possession the leaders' names, the strength of the United Irishmen, and the quantities of arms, could at any moment have stamped out the agitation, suppressed the Rebellion and prevented a civil war with all its horrors.

"WHY did the government not do so?

"Because that would not have suited its purpose. Blood must be shed! Creed must war against creed; faction against faction; Ireland must be divided against herself, and then her chains would be riveted the stronger".[165]

By 21 May, 1798, the day that had been chosen for the Rising in the north, most of its leaders had lost their courage. Some had been arrested and imprisoned while others had turned informer. It is believed that of 24,000 registered members of the United Irishmen, only 8,000 actually fought when the time came to do so. Again Lyttle gives an insight into the actions of the government which caused such fear in the members of the Society and the public at large:

"Promises were made but to be broken; proclamations which were commenced by offering an amnesty merged into sanguinary denunciations and ended by devoting whole towns to plunder and destruction by fire. The free quartering of the soldiery brought terror to Royalists and Insurgents alike. The army, thus quartered, abandoned themselves to all the brutal excesses of which a licentious soldiery could be capable, and as the gallant Abercrombie stated, they were formidable to all but the enemy. From the highest to the lowest, from the noblest mansion to the humblest hut, no one was safe or secure. Men, youths, aye, and women too, died under the lash; many were strangled because they could not, or would not, make confessions. In their beds, in the bosoms of their families – all to amuse a wanton and brutal soldiery. Torture was inflicted without mercy and without regard to age, sex or condition".[166]

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[165] *Ibid.,* p. 80.
[166] *Ibid.,* pp. 82-83.

Despite the widespread horrors and torture inflicted by government soldiers on the native population, which included public hangings and pitch capping as well as the outrages mentioned above, by the beginning of June 1798, many stalwart members of the Society in Ulster were impatient and anxious to fight the enemy.

Henry Joy McCracken

The Counties of Down and Antrim had decided to band together. But the arrest of Revd William Steele Dickson meant that Antrim was without its leader. Without further delay, Henry Joy McCracken was chosen in his place. McCracken, born in Belfast, was the son of ship-owner Captain John McCracken, and his wife Ann Joy, whose family were successful linen manufacturers of Huguenot descent and founders of the Whig newspaper, the *Belfast News Letter*. Along with his sister, Mary Ann, Henry pioneered non-religious education for the poor and supported Edward Bunting to compile, transcribe and preserve Irish musical airs for the harp. He was one of the founding members of the Society of the United Irishmen.

McCracken decided that taking the town of Antrim would be their first objective, by doing so allowing expected assistance from Derry and Donegal to arrive quickly and safely. Many of his men were armed only with scythes, pitchforks, pikes and swords, others with a small number of guns and basic artillery. McCracken organised his marching men with exemplary discipline and inspired in them great courage. Within sight of Antrim he rallied his men with these words:

"Men of Ulster! The hour has come for you to strike the first blow for Ireland and for liberty. Victory is certain! Musketeers, let every bullet find its mark! Pike men, stand firm in the shock of battle, and let your trusty blades forged for you by true and trusty men, be a wall of steel upon which, if our foemen rush, they rush to death! Remember William Orr"!

Government forces, aware of their plans, assembled and lay in wait for the Insurgents to arrive. McCracken's men took the town against heavy opposite numbers, but it was soon retaken by the enemy, forcing McCracken to march, with the remnants of his army, to the town of Ballymena. Before he reached there he was captured, eventually tried by Court-marshal, found guilty and publicly executed in Belfast.

Down Rises

Meanwhile in Down, Henry Munro, a linen merchant from Lisburn, an Episcopalian and former Volunteer, had been appointed leader of the rebels there.

At this point, in early June 1798, Betsy Gray's brother, George, and her paramour, William Boal, were finally making arrangements to take part in the Uprising. They, along with Colonel Bryson's son David, his daughter Eliza, and William Warwick's fiancée Mary, were also in attendance. Listening intently to their plans, Betsy announced that she was intent on joining them, as was her friend Eliza Bryson. Betsy showed the men the sword she had obtained from Willie Boal. George would not hear of it, saying that she must remain in Granshaw and pray for their success. But Betsy was adamant: she was going to fight for her country alongside them. A poem, expressing her reasons and commitment, has passed down through the centuries.

An Irish Maid

An Irish maid in heart and soul
I love the dear old land;
Honour those who in her cause
Lift voice, or pen, or hand.

And may I live to see her free
From foreign lord and knave;
But Heaven forbid I'd ever be
The mother of a slave.

God bless the men who take their stand
In Ireland's patriot host;
I'd give the youth my heart and hand
Who serves his country most;

And if he fell, I'd rather lie
Beside him in the grave,
Than wed a wealthy loon, and be
The mother of a slave.

Thro' many a blood-red age of woe
Our nation's heart has bled;
But still she makes her tyrants know
Her spirit is not dead.

God bless the men who for her sake
Their blood and genius gave;
God bless the mothers of those sons
Who nursed no dastard slave!

Some on the scaffold place of doom
For loving Ireland died;
And others to the dungeon gloom,
Are torn from our side;

But God the Just, who ne'er designed
His image for a slave,
Will give our country might and mind
To raise the true and brave.

Abandoning hope of dissuading this determined young woman, the men reluctantly turned their talk to one of their first objectives: to rescue Eliza's and David's father, Colonel Bryson, from imprisonment at the Market House in Newtownards. They knew the soldiers stationed there would set out the next morning to march to Saintfield, to deal with Insurgents in the town. On 9 June, exploiting the reduced security at Newtownards, the raiding party of Granshaw and Cottown successfully overwhelmed the few remaining soldiers at Newtownards and rescued Colonel Bryson.

County Down was now in arms. Thousands marched towards Ballynahinch. Some took Saintfield, after dispelling Royalists there. But at Portaferry, the Insurgents were repelled. On 11 June, a proclamation was issued by Major-General Nugent to the people of County Down, seeking their submission and atonement, and a laying down of arms within

twenty-four hours. Failure to comply would result in the Royalists destroying *"the towns of Killinchy, Killyleagh, Ballynahinch, Saintfield and every cottage and farmhouse in the vicinity of these four places, carry off the stock and cattle and put everyone to the sword who may be found in arms"*.[167]

When General Munro read this proclamation to his men it was met with derision and jeers. He immediately sent 7,000 men to take Saintfield, which they did easily, without resistance. Munro, with more of his men, marched towards Ballynahinch, while Nugent, joined by Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart, and their soldiers, prepared to intercept him. When they met, the Royalists' weaponry was far superior, compelling Munro to retreat.

Sending some of his men to evacuate Ballynahinch, Munro and others headed for the Hill of Ednavady. By evening, British troops had reached Ballynahinch and began burning, drinking and plundering. When news of this reached Munro, his men urged him to march into Ballynahinch and take prisoners of all the drunken Royalists. But Munro refused to do this. Apparently, he would only fight them in the light of day and would not take advantage of the darkness of nightfall. This pronouncement was seen as a grave mistake. Many of his men, disillusioned by their leader's decision, deserted him, while others marched off under a different leader.

At another encounter with General Nugent the following day, Munro stationed some of his men, led by a young officer, McCance, at the top of Windmill Hill, hidden by fences and unseen by the approaching Nugent. They managed to hold off Nugent and his men, causing many casualties without loss to themselves, and so prevented the Royalists from entering Ballynahinch. But, lacking heavy artillery, Munro decided to withdraw his troops from the summit of Windmill Hill and join forces with the rest of his army at Ednavady, in preparation for a full-scale attack on the government soldiers. He sent an order to McCance to leave his station. McCance, however, refused the order, and instead sent word that he needed reinforcements. After a third order was made he reluctantly left his post, at which point Nugent's army took the whole Hill. But two of McCance's men had been left behind: one was refusing to leave and the other was overcome with fatigue. The former kept firing at Nugent's men, injuring many of them, until he ran out of ammunition. At last he left the spot and reached the safety of his own troop. The other

[167] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

man was woken from his sleep by Nugent's soldiers and hung up to die on the blade of an old windmill, to the approval of the English soldiers involved.

Later that night, Munro walked among his remaining men as they rested, encouraging them for the requirements of the following day. It was then that Betsy Gray made her appearance:

"It was during the night of the 12th that our heroine, Betsy Gray, reached Ednavady. Despite the remonstrances of her father, she carried out her original resolution. Putting a fine mare to an old block-wheel car, and loading the car with cheese, butter and home-made bread, she started, alone and undaunted, upon her perilous journey. She reached Ednavady in safety, was immediately recognised, and was received with every demonstration of enthusiasm. Her brother and Willie Boal were soon by her side, and the former, in the excitement of the moment, readily forgave his sister for her disobedience of his orders".[168]

The following morning, as both sides exchanged fire, Betsy Gray, wearing a green silk outfit, sat upon her white horse, wielding her sword and cheering on the men who were determined to reach the town of Ballynahinch. Once there, *"She dashed into the very thickest and hottest of the fight, and, with a heroism that never failed, emboldened the Insurgents by her daring of danger and of death".*[169]

Although running short of ammunition, Munro and his men reached the centre of the town and charged the Royalists with their pikes. The onslaught was so fierce and furious that Royalists sounded their retreat but, in the confusion, Munro and his followers did not follow through to their own advantage, mistaking the Royalists' signal of retreat for a charge. Some ended up in hand-to-hand combat with an enemy more skilled in such tactics, others fled in one direction while the enemy was still fleeing in another. A victory for the Insurgents had been turned into their defeat. They were attacked by the 22nd Light Dragoons, who up until then had played no part in the battle, and who were soon joined by Nugent's men recovering from their panic. The Insurgents were fired on at close range by shot from Nugent's cannon and decimated. The town of Ballynahinch was in flames. All but a few of the residents had abandoned the town and those who had stayed were slain. What was left of the Insurgents' army fled in all directions, escape now being their sole priority.

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[168] *Ibid.,* p. 126.
[169] *Ibid.,* p. 127.

Many lay down in turf bogs, and amid tall corn growing in the fields, in the hope of hiding from their pursuers, who relentlessly re-assembled in small units, spread across the townlands surrounding Ballynahinch, the better to hunt down their prey. When caught, the Down men were slain, hacked to death with unmerciful ruthlessness.

Munro himself took refuge in houses of patriot people in the Ballynahinch area. But the danger of being discovered forced him to keep moving. He ended up in the house of one Billie Holmes, who was rewarded with money to keep Munro concealed. But Holmes and his wife had no intention of keeping to their pact. When Munro was hidden and lying asleep, Holmes' wife headed to the town of Hillsborough and betrayed him to some Yeomen she met there. Munro was captured and marched first to Dromore and then to Lisburn, the town of his own residence. While there, supporters sent him fresh clothes and food. But on 17 June, was tried by Court-martial, found guilty and condemned to death. He was hanged and decapitated shortly afterwards.

As for Betsy Gray and her fellow Insurgents, after the fall of Ballynahinch, she, along with her brother George and Willie Boal, fled for their lives along the Lisburn road. They approached Ballycreen, where Betsy dismounted her horse the better to evade detection. She was in front and waited for the others there, in a hiding place. However, before the other two could reach it, they were pursued by Yeomen from Hillsborough. They turned, not to surrender, but to confront their pursuers in the hope of saving Betsy, by not revealing her hiding place. They were both struck by the swords of the Yeomen. When Betsy heard their cries she revealed herself and rushed to help them. Willie Boal was lying, dying, on the ground. Her brother George was about to have a sword plunged into his back.

Lyttle continues:

"Betsy grasped the weapon in her naked hands, and madly strove to wrench it from the fellow's grasp.

" 'Mercy!' she cried; 'if you are men, spare my brother's life'. Her appeal was in vain. At the sound of her voice George turned round and begged her to fly.

" 'Never!' exclaimed Betsy. 'Oh, for my trusty blade now, that I might avenge the murder of my poor Willie!'

"Even as she spoke she was set upon by three of the ruffianly band. One of them struck her upon the wrist with his sword, cutting her hand completely off; another put his pistol close to her eyes and sent a bullet crashing through her brain. At the same instant her brother was shot, and the three brave, but unfortunate, companions lay bleeding upon the green sod.

"Even then the butchers were not satisfied. While some of them hacked and hewed the quivering bodies of George Gray and William Boal, others of them desecrated the corpse of Betsy. They stripped her of nearly all her clothing, and one brute tore her earrings from her ears and the rings off her fingers.

"A more brutal deed has never been recorded. An officer, who came up shortly after the Yeomen had decamped in search of fresh victims, gazed long and earnestly at the dead body of Betsy Gray.

" 'A fairer face I have never looked upon,' exclaimed the soldier, 'and, by Heavens, the fellow who slew her is a murderer of the blackest dye!'

"The names of some of the participators of the foul deed are well known, they were from Anahilt. To the day of their death they were abhorred and avoided as a pestilence, alike by Orange and Green, Protestant and Catholic, saint and sinner. Their descendants suffer for the deeds of their ancestors, as till the present day they share the odium which justly attached to the cowardly and bloodthirsty scoundrels, who slew a lovely and defenceless woman and two helpless and unarmed men.

"The story has been recorded by the historian, and sung by the poet: a ballad detailing which is still familiar in thousands of homes".[170]

Lyttle then provides his readers with the words of 'A Ballad of Ninety-Eight' outlining the events set out above.[171]

Betsy Gray's Legacy

Had it not been for the research of Wesley Guard Lyttle, undertaken almost one hundred years after Betsy Gray's death, by interviewing the local people of north County Down, many of whom were descendants of the people involved, we would probably have never found out about her courage and her martyrdom. Her story had been remembered locally in story and song, and handed down through the generations, with admiration and respect. How typical her actions were of women of the day we cannot know for certain, but we are told that her friend Eliza Bryson was also determined to take up arms and join

[170] *Ibid.,* p. 143-144.
[171] *Ibid.,* p. 144.

the United Irishmen. Women were certainly involved as supporters of the Rebellion, many even as members of the United Irishmen, but how many, if any, acted as Betsy Gray did remains undiscovered.

The impression arising from the narrative above is that Betsy's actions were far from being a common-place activity for women. Therefore, on that reckoning alone, Betsy was a remarkable, determined and brave woman, who gave her life for a cause she understood and believed in. And this is all the more so given her Protestant religion and Planter background.

It must be acknowledged that Irish Catholics of the late-eighteenth century owe a debt of gratitude to the descendants of the Presbyterian Planters who came to Ulster in the early seventeenth century. That the latter had acknowledged the discrimination and unfair treatment meted out to Catholics, and had united with them to take up arms in an effort to stop such discrimination, is inspiring and has not been given the recognition it deserves. Granted, the founding Presbyterians of the Ulster Society of the United Irishmen, and their co-religionists, were never as badly affected by the Penal Laws and other forms of discriminations as their fellow Catholics had been. After all, they enjoyed a much higher degree of material prosperity, income and education than their Catholic neighbours; and the land they owned and benefited from was appropriated from those same Catholic neighbours' ancestors during the Plantation of Ulster. Nevertheless, they were prepared to give their lives to the cause of equality for all, and they did so. It is also clear from Betsy Gray's story, as told by Lyttle, that the Ulster population as a whole not only agreed with the aims and actions of the United Irishmen, but actively supported them.

Perhaps Betsy Gray's greatest legacy is that her gender, generosity, courage, commitment, determination, membership of a prescribed revolutionary organisation that was devoted to equal rights for all religions and independence from England, and her ultimate sacrifice, remain a standard by which we can measure how possible it is for people of differing faiths to respect, uphold and fight for the rights of those less fortunate.

However, the contrast between Presbyterian and Catholic co-operation and brotherhood, then and now, is stark. That contrast came to light at the time of the centenary celebrations of the United Irishmen Rising, in 1898. Ulster Presbyterians had erected a memorial to Betsy Gray in 1896, at the site of her death and burial at Ballycreen, even though the descendants of the original Insurgents were, by that time, true and loyal subjects of the British Crown. Two years later, the same community that erected the memorial wantonly

destroyed it, when it became known that Catholics and members of the Home Rule movement were intent on holding a special commemoration there, and they fought with those who arrived at the place expecting to take part in the commemoration. As one commentator points out, "*Because they [the locals] didn't like these people claiming Betsy . . . they became so enraged that they decided to prevent the ceremony taking place, so they smashed the monument with sledge-hammers*".[172]

Obviously, the events of the intervening one hundred years had driven a new wedge between Catholics and Protestants in Ulster after the 1798 Rebellion. The English/British government were master practitioners of social engineering then, and still are. The divisions and inequality between Catholics and Protestants were further copper-fastened, on a constitutional foundation, by the passing of the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which partitioned the north of the Ireland from the rest of Ireland, and created the entity still known as Northern Ireland, one which still remains under British rule. Admittedly, one hundred years later, great changes have taken place in the North, and a mechanism for the peaceful, constitutional unification of Ireland has been established, but at a terrible cost during the intervening years.

The 1798 Rebellion may have been a military failure but, in the words of a present-day saying, urging those who are disheartened not to give up after perceived personal failure and disappointment, the only conceivable course ahead is to, *Get up! Try again! Fail better!* And that is exactly what those resisting British rule in Ireland did, both immediately after the failed 1798 Rebellion and during the centuries that followed.

Ireland's Union with Britain

In 1800, two simultaneous Acts of parliament were passed, one in England, the other in Ireland. They both had the same effect: Ireland would no longer have its own parliament, as it would thereafter be subsumed into the Westminster parliament. The new amalgamation of countries would be called "The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland". Ireland was no longer an independent country in any sense whatsoever.

This change came about, of course, as a direct result of how the United Irishmen Rebellion was handled, or mishandled, by the Irish government. Discrimination against Catholics was gradually abolished in the years that followed, in no small way brought about by the non-military campaign for Catholic emancipation led by Daniel O'Connell.

[172] Jonathan Trigg et al., *Theory and History in Irish Conflict*, Rosetta 10: 16-48 (Jan., 2011), p.26.

Discrimination against Presbyterians was effectively abolished by the creation of a new Protestant ascendancy, which now included Presbyterians as well as Anglicans. Various government drives to foster antagonism between the two formerly cooperating religious factions were successful. For example, former Presbyterian United Irishmen were admitted into the Yeomanry, and they were given more opportunities to economically benefit from the growth in production and trade in Ulster.

It should be mentioned that another Rebellion, led by United Irishman Robert Emmet, took place in Dublin in 1803, supported by Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians. But it did not gain the support of the French that had been promised and many surviving United Irishmen of the 1798 Rebellion were wary of lending their support. Emmet's Rebellion was short lived and unsuccessful. Nevertheless, his speech from the dock has won an iconic place in Irish history and has inspired generations of Irish resistance fighters, including Padraig Pearse (see Chapter 6), who claimed that Emmet's attempt to establish a provisional government of Ireland in 1803 was *"not a failure, but a triumph for that deathless thing we call Irish nationality"*.[173] An abridged version of the speech is set out below.

Robert Emmet's Speech from the Dock

"My Lords, I am asked what I have to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced on me, according to law. I have nothing to say that can alter your predetermination, nor that it will become me to say, with any view to the mitigation of that sentence which you are to pronounce, and I must abide by. But I have that to say which interests me more than life, and which you have laboured to destroy. I have much to say why my reputation should be rescued from the load of false accusation and calumny which has been cast upon it . . .

When my spirit shall have wafted to a more friendly port – when my shade shall have joined the bands of those martyred heroes who have shed their blood on the scaffold and in the field in the defence of their country, and of virtue, this is my hope – I wish that my memory and name may animate those who survive me, while I look down with complacency on the destruction of that perfidious government which upholds its domination by blasphemy of the Most High – which displays its power over man, as over the beasts of the forest – which sets man upon his brother, and lifts his hand in the name of God, against the throat of his fellow who believes or doubts a little more

[173] *Pádraig Pearse, Robert Emmet and the Ireland of Today, An Address Delivered at the Emmet Commemoration in the Academy of Music, Brooklyn* (New York, 2 Mar., 1914).

or a little less than the government standard – a government which is steeled to barbarity by the cries of the orphans, and the tears of the widows it has made.

"I appeal to the immaculate God – I swear by the throne of Heaven, before which I must shortly appear – by the blood of the murdered patriots who have gone before me – that my conduct has been, through all this peril, and through all my purposes, governed only by the conviction which I have uttered, and by no other view than that of the emancipation of my country from the superhuman oppression under which she has so long and too patiently travailed.

"My Lords, it may be a part of the system of angry justice to bow a man's mind by humiliation to the proposed ignominy of the scaffold; but worse to me than the purposed shame of the scaffold's terrors, would be the shame of such foul and unfounded imputations as have been laid against me in this Court . . .

"I acted as an Irishman, determined on delivering my country from the yoke of a foreign and unrelenting tyranny, and the more galling yoke of a domestic faction, which is its joint partner and perpetrator in the patricide, from the ignominy existing with an exterior of splendour and a conscious depravity. It was the wish of my heart to extricate my country from this doubly riveted despotism – I wished to place her independence beyond the reach of any power on earth. I wished to exalt her to that proud station in the world.

"I wished to procure for my country the guarantee which Washington procured for America – to procure an aid which, by its example, would be as important as its valour; disciplined, gallant, pregnant with science and expedience; that of a people who would preserve the good, and polish the rough points of our character. They would come to us as strangers, and leave us as friends, after sharing in our perils, and elevating our destiny. These were my objects; not to receive new taskmasters, but to expel old tyrants. It was for these ends I sought aid from France; because France, even as an enemy, could not be more implacable than the enemy already in the bosom of my country.

"Let no man dare, when I am dead, to charge me with dishonour; let no man attaint my memory, by believing that I could have engaged in any cause but that of my country's liberty and independence; or that I could have become the pliant minion of power, in the oppression and misery of my country. The proclamation of the Provisional government speaks for our views; no inference can be tortured from it to countenance barbarity or debasement at home, or subjection, humiliation, or treachery from abroad. I would not have submitted to a foreign oppressor, for the same reason that I would resist the foreign and domestic oppressor. In the dignity of freedom, I would have fought upon the threshold of my country, and its enemy should enter only by passing over my

lifeless corpse. And am I, who lived but for my country, and who have subjected myself to the dangers of the jealous and watchful oppressor, and the bondage of the grave, only to give my countrymen their rights, and my country her independence, am I to be loaded with calumny, and not suffered to resent it? No; God forbid!

"I have but one request to ask from this world, it is – THE CHARITY OF ITS SILENCE – Let no man write my epitaph; for as no man knows my motives dare now vindicate them, let not prejudice or ignorance asperse them.

"Let them and me rest in obscurity and peace; and my tomb remain uninscribed, and my memory in oblivion, until other times and other men can do justice to my character. When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then and not until then, let my epitaph be written. I have done."[174]

True to his wishes, Emmet's epitaph remains unwritten, and his tomb uninscribed; and neither has his country (at least, not his *unified* country) yet taken its place among the nations of the earth. No quasi-epitaph will be written here for him: but it is fair to say that his own speech from the dock has much the same effect. It is eloquent, learned, defiant and inspirational. His speech, as well as his life, is his legacy to the Irish nation.

[174] See *www.libraryireland.com/articles/EmmetSpeechesDock/index.php* for the full version of Emmet's Speech.

Chapter Five

Eugene O'Curry (1794-1862)

THE FIRST HALF of the nineteenth century, like the two centuries preceding it, was hardly auspicious for Gaelic Ireland. Seventeenth-century upheavals had brought about the collapse of the Brehon Law system and, with it, the Gaelic systems of land ownership and land use, social and inter-personal relationships and economic activity. The eighteenth century had reinforced this disintegration, with the introduction of new laws designed to eradicate Catholicism, and the penalisation of those who refused to adopt the established religion of the Church of Ireland.

By the end of the eighteenth century a political uprising, organised by the United Irishmen, based mainly around the south east and north east coasts, and supported by Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter, had taken place and had been brutally suppressed. From 1801 onwards, Ireland no longer had its own parliament and had become politically and economically integrated into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland by a simultaneous Act of Union of both parliaments.

In addition, a policy of deforestation of land ensured that there were very few places left that were inaccessible to the ruling administrative forces for the purpose of gaining access to the native population; and even fewer places available for those actively opposing that administration in which to hide. An advanced road network allowed estate owners easy access to ports for the export of their agricultural produce. Ownership of land was overwhelmingly in the hands of Protestants, with the majority of those tilling the soil doing so as non-landowning tenants, with no security of tenure and little or no economic surplus at the end of the year. The absentee landlord system ensured that land was sub-divided into ever smaller holdings; while the poorest populations, surviving on the potato crop, grew other crops solely for export and to pay their rents. Those unable to pay

their rents were simply evicted. When the potato crop was struck by blight in the mid-nineteenth century, the economic system was ruthless in decimating those members of the native Irish population that had become surplus to requirements, either through death by famine, by illness or by mass emigration.

While it may not, on first impressions, seem like a very important topic within the history of resistance to British oppression in Ireland, nevertheless, this Chapter explores the work of two outstanding Gaelic language academics and translators of ancient manuscripts, especially the lost and forgotten manuscripts containing the ancient laws of Ireland. As will become clear, their work was fundamental to later developments in the struggle for Irish freedom.

Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan

Unlike Hugh O'Neill, neither Eugene O'Curry, nor his good friend and colleague John O'Donovan, organised, or engaged in, military battles against English forces. Unlike Charles O'Conor of Belanagare, they were not born into ancient, elite Gaelic families and were not involved in clandestine campaigns to abolish the Penal Laws. Unlike Betsy Gray, they did not participate in, nor give their lives to, popular, cross-denominational uprisings such as that of the United Irishmen. Rather, those two men, in the mid-nineteenth century, kept alive the spirit and knowledge of Gaelic culture that would otherwise not have survived Charles O'Conor's death; and they inspired a later generation to continue the centuries-old resistance against England's colonisation of Ireland by returning to them the knowledge of what the coloniser had abolished, ruined and eradicated, and by giving them an interest and pride in their almost forgotten culture and language. In their case, the pen was truly mightier than the sword in the history of resistance to English/British imperialism in Ireland.

Eugene O'Curry

Eugene O'Curry was born in Doonaha, County Clare, the son of a small farmer. As with Charles O'Conor of Belanagare, he received an education in the old Gaelic ways, not by specialist tutors but rather within a self-help community of scholars. As well as a Gaelic curriculum, he was taught arithmetic, music, geography, book-keeping and English grammar.

O'Curry's local area had been ravaged by Cromwell's troops but, after that, being isolated and of poor terrain, with a very scattered population and of minimal economic value, it

was more or less left to its own devices. It was one of the last areas in Ireland to practise the Brehon Laws (which, it will be remembered, were finally eradicated by the English after the Flight of the Earls in 1607 and the Plantation of Ulster shortly afterwards, almost two hundred years before Eugene O'Curry was born). Many of the local people in O'Curry's time, as well as having a deep love of native learning, also owned valuable ancient manuscripts "*. . . transmitted to them by their ancestors, who, owing to their fortunate obscurity, and their settlement in a barren sea-bound tract, had been able to retain these heir-looms at a time when the possession of an Irish book made the owner a suspected person and was often the cause of his ruin*".[175]

Eugene's father, Owen Mór O'Curry, whose ancestors were members of the powerful Dál gCais, or Dalcassian, clan of Thomond, could trace his line back to a druidic scholar of the fifth century and, as the writer, SA, informs us,

"[He] had a thorough knowledge of the antiquities and traditions of the country, and dearly loved his native tongue. He was an accomplished reader of Irish – a matter of no easy acquisition, owing to the peculiar difficulties of Gaelic orthography. He had a fine collection of manuscripts, inherited from his forefathers, or otherwise acquired, which formed in fact a little library, numbering more than fifty books".[176]

Eugene spent hours transcribing these and other manuscripts that he himself had procured. At the age of thirty he moved to Limerick and worked in a mental hospital there. Shortly afterwards, following the death of his father, he wrote to a friend that,

"It was not until after my father's death that I fully awoke to the passion of gathering those old fragments of our history. I knew that he was a link between our day and a time when everything was broken, scattered and hidden; and when I called to mind the knowledge he possessed of every old ruin, every old manuscript, every old legend and tradition in Thomond, I was suddenly filled with consternation to think that all was gone for ever, and no record made of it".[177]

This realisation of O'Curry's coincided with the Royal Irish Academy's attempts to collect ancient Irish manuscripts. O'Curry, through circumstances of a chance meeting at his

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[175] SA, *Eugene O'Curry*, The Irish Monthly, vol. 2 (1874), pp. 191-210 at p. 192. Much of the research for this Chapter (as with Chapter 3) was first undertaken by the author of this book for her PhD thesis, entitled *Rediscovering Ireland's Ancient Laws* (School of Law, University of Limerick, 2013).
[176] *Ibid.*, p. 194.
[177] *Ibid.*, p. 196, quoting Eugene O'Curry's obituary in *The Morning News*, written by a friend.

place of employment, was given a commission to procure as many as he could on behalf of the Academy.

In 1834, at the age of forty, he took up a position in the Topographical and Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey in Dublin, where he became an expert in ancient manuscripts and ancient Irish. After his work at the Ordnance Survey was terminated in 1842, he continued to work for the Royal Irish Academy, being engaged in procuring and translating manuscripts in Ireland and England. In 1854, at the age of sixty years, he became the first Professor of Irish History and Archaeology at the newly established Catholic University of Dublin.

There can be little doubt that O'Curry, steeped in Gaelic culture as his father had been before him, was conscious of his role in taking up the torch handed down by Charles O'Conor. Indeed, one of his father's friends, Peadar Ó Conaill, a frequent visitor to the O'Curry household, spent most of his life compiling an Irish dictionary and, along with other scribes, is recorded as having paid several visits to Charles O'Conor in Belanagare.

In addition, Eugene's awareness of, and involvement in, the mystical tradition of Ireland can be seen from his poem, *Do You Remember That Night,* translated from Irish. On first reading, it appears to be an innocuous love poem but, following in the custom of Gaelic (or Bardic) poets, it also contains a hidden meaning and message (such as a lament for Ireland's lost Gaelic past, a sadness for her present troubles and a determination to act to change this state of affairs).

Do You Remember That Night

Do you remember that night
That you were at the window,
With neither hat nor gloves,
Nor coat to shelter you;
I reached out my hand to you,
And you ardently grasped it,
And I remained in converse with you
Until the lark began to sing?

Do you remember that night
That you and I were
At the foot of the rowan tree,

And the night drifting snow;
Your head on my breast,
And your pipe sweetly playing?
I little thought that night
Our ties of love would ever loosen.

O beloved of my inmost heart,
Come soon night and soon,
When my people are at rest,
That we may talk together;
My arms shall encircle you,
While I relate my sad tale
That is your pleasant, soft converse
That has deprived me of heaven.

The fire is unraked,
The light is extinguished,
The key under the door,
And do you softly draw it.
My mother is asleep,
And I am quite awake;
My fortune is in my hand,
And I am ready to go with you.

So outstanding was O'Curry's knowledge of Ireland's ancient past, including her language, customs and laws, that his obituary writer, SA, in summing up his life's work in the service of antiquarian research, states:

"Ideas of greatness may and do differ, but if the highest moral purposes sustained by the highest moral courage, constitute grounds and a standard; if the rarest union of patient labour and sleepless enthusiasm have any claim to be so considered; if a continuous career of recovery and discovery, in a long domain of learned enquiry, may be called proofs of greatness; then, assuredly, when Ireland counts her famous sons of this age, that indomitable academician's name will be pronounced among the very first of her magnates".[178]

[178] *Ibid.,* p. 201.

However, Eugene O'Curry's work can best be fully understood, and appreciated, when seen as a collaboration with another outstanding man of his time, John O'Donovan.

John O'Donovan (1806-1861)

John O'Donovan, of mixed native Irish and Planter heritage, was born in Atateemore, County Kilkenny. He was educated by the efforts of his brother, a farmer of some forty acres, and became learned in Irish and Latin. His uncle Patrick was known as a "*the living repository of the traditions of the counties Kilkenny, Carlow and Wexford*"[179] and O'Donovan himself acknowledged that it was from his uncle that he *"first caught that love for Irish and Anglo-Irish history which have since afforded him so much amusement*".[180]

In 1823, he and his brother moved to Dublin, where John studied Latin with the intention of going on to Maynooth for further study. However, within four years he had taken up a position in the Irish Records Office with James Hardiman, transcribing Irish manuscripts, and through him received an entrée into the antiquarian world. In 1829 he applied for a vacancy in the Topographical and Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey office, where he worked for the next thirteen years, until 1842, whereupon it closed down. During this period, and afterwards, he worked on cataloguing Irish manuscripts held at Trinity College Dublin, as well as taking on private translations.

O'Donovan translated many important works from Gaelic to English, including *Tribes and Customs of the Hy Many and Hy Fiacrach*; the topographical poems of *Ó* Dubhagáin and Ó hUidrin; the *Circuit of Ireland* by Muircherteach MacNeill; the *Banquet of Dun na nGedh*; the *Battle of Magh Rath*, *Leabhar na Ceart* and the *Martyrology of Donegal*. He also produced an *Irish Grammar* (1845). But, undoubtedly, it is his translation of *The Annals of the Four Masters*[181] which is his most celebrated work.

Senator Helena Concannon (1878-1952), an Irish historian, and one of very few who wrote *"a specifically Catholic Irish nationalist historical narrative, as well as . . . writing women into that narrative"*,[182] wrote about O'Donovan at the time of the centenary of the Great Irish Famine. She reflected on the state of Ireland in the mid-nineteenth century:

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[179] H Concannon, *John O'Donovan and The Annals of the Four Masters,* Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review, vol. 37, no. 147 (Sept., 1948), pp. 300-307 at p. 300.
[180] *Ibid.,* p. 302.
[181] J O'Donovan (trans.), *Annála Ríoghachta Éireann: Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616,* 7 vols, (Dublin, 1856).
[182] NC Smith, A "Manly Study"? Irish Women Historians, 1868-1949 (Hampshire, 2006), pp. 117-118.

". . . 1848, that year seems to us, in its tragedies and frustrations, one of the most gloomy and despairing in Irish history. To mention 'Forty-Eight' conjures up the vision of an Ireland scourged by famine and fever and landlordism; its cities and towns thronged with ragged hordes of the 'Dispossessed'; its countrysides desolate with roofless farmsteads and drained by the emigrant ships; John Mitchel, a convicted 'felon' in the hulks of the Dromedary on his way to Van Diemen's Land; William Smith O'Brien, Thomas Frances Meagher, Patrick O'Donoghue, Terence Bellew McManus standing in the dock at Clonmel to hear themselves sentenced to be 'hanged, drawn and quartered'; Duffy in prison; Thomas D'Arcy McGee in exile".

She continues, with specific praise for John O'Donovan during this bleak time,

"How strange to think that a year so heavy for Ireland with failure and sorrow should date one of the most important events in her cultural history: the publication of the first part of John O'Donovan's edition of the Annals of the Four Masters".[183]

In 1847 O'Donovan was admitted to the Irish Bar and in the following year was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate of Laws by Trinity College Dublin. He was later appointed as Professor of Celtic Languages at Queen's University in Belfast. Although he had by then decided to emigrate to America, his appointment as an editor and translator by the Brehon Law Commission (see below) ensured that he remained in Ireland.

George Petrie

For many years O'Curry and O'Donovan worked with another great scholar of the mid-nineteenth century, George Petrie. Born in Dublin of Scottish Presbyterian stock, Petrie was an artist, musician, antiquarian, archaeologist and historian. His father was a portrait painter[184] and George, in his early work, illustrated books published by travel writers. In

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[183] H Concannon, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

[184] Petrie, as a child alone in his father's studio, witnessed an incident which affected him profoundly. "*One day he was sitting in a corner of his father's studio, when a lady called to see a portrait which his father had just finished. The lady, thickly veiled, entered the room, without noticing the boy. She walked straight to the easel, on which the portrait rested. She lifted her veil, stood long, and in unbroken stillness, gazing at the face; then, suddenly turning, she moved with an unsteady step to another corner of the room, and, bending forward, pressed her forehead against the wall, heaving deep sobs, her whole frame shaken with a storm of passionate grief. How long the agony lasted the boy could not tell; it appeared to him to be an hour; and then, with a sudden effort she controlled herself, pulled down her veil, and as quickly and silently left the room as she had come into it. She was unaware of his presence, unconscious of the depths of silent sympathy she had awakened in the heart of the boy, whose sensitive and delicate nature kept him from intruding on her grief. The lady was Sarah Curran, the portrait was that of Robert Emmet!" (*Source: MF Cox, *George Petrie*, The Irish Monthly, vol. 41, no. 479 (May, 1913), pp. 233-248 at p. 235.)

so doing, he travelled to sacred places, such as the ancient monastic site at Clonmacnoise, where he was deeply affected by what he experienced.[185]

As well as being moved by the places he visited, Petrie took a deep interest in the native people of Ireland, especially those in the west, in places such as the Aran Islands. He saw and admired in them the last remnants of Gaelic civilisation:

"*. . . they are therefore to be considered, not as a fair specimen of the 'wild Irish' of the present day, but rather as a striking example of what that race might generally be under circumstances equally happy".*[186]

From 1831 to 1855 Petrie produced many learned works for the Royal Irish Academy[187] and also donated ancient manuscripts to that body. From 1833 to 1846 he worked with the Ordnance Survey in Ireland, with Sir Thomas Drummond and Sir Thomas Larcom, and it was there that he met Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan. In 1835 he was appointed head of the Survey's Topographical and Historical Department.

Despite the enormous sense of doom and gloom described by Senator Concannon, some small glimmerings of hope were beginning to appear in Ireland at that time. All three men, Eugene O'Curry, John O'Donovan and George Petrie, from very different backgrounds, came together in the mid-nineteenth century to bring light and life to Gaelic culture, by then virtually destroyed and forgotten. It all started with the Ordnance Survey of Ireland.

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[185] Of his first impressions on visiting Clonmacnoise, Petrie wrote: *"It was not without a considerable feeling of romance that we approached this, the most interesting spot that our island affords; nor without some emotion of awe that we entered its lonely and sacred precincts. Once the chief seat of piety and learning of the Insula Sanctorum, now a place hardly known to the inhabitants of Ireland, yet for ages held the most sacred and venerated; the Iona of Ireland, which her princes embellished, and containing the tombs of her noblest in blood. Journeying thither, we indulged our fancy in such pleasing anticipations as that we should find among the ruins of those ancient temples sufficient evidence that Ireland was not ignorant of architectural art, as practised in Europe during the early ages of Christianity; and that among the tombs we should discover inscriptions which would show her ancient history was not, as is generally believed, a fable. Those pleasing hopes were more than realised".* (Source: *Ibid*., p. 237.)

[186] *Ibid*., p. 243.

[187] These included works such as *The Architecture and Round Towers of* Ireland (1833); *The Military Architecture of Ireland* (1834); *Remarks on the Book of MacFirbis* (1837) and *On the History and Antiquities of Tara* (1837).

The Ordnance Survey

In order to set a valuation on Irish land to assess land taxes, but also to map out the whole country in order to facilitate access to all areas, as much as for 'security' purposes as well as for building roads to facilitate trade and commerce, the Ordnance Survey was set up in Ireland by the British government in 1824. The triangulation measuring was undertaken, on a county-by-county basis, by engineers from the British army, with some assistance regarding boundaries given by local residents.

Large-scale maps (6 inches to 1 mile) of each parish were drawn up, on which detailed information, provided by local landowners and members of the Church of Ireland clergy, was shown. This information, including placenames, was collected and forwarded to Sir Thomas Larcom at the Survey's headquarters at Mountjoy Barracks in the Phoenix Park in Dublin. From 1830 onwards, John O'Donovan's work on the survey involved researching the ancient forms of those placenames, with the objective of reaching an approved form and spelling. This Topographical and Historical Department of the Survey also included research to help establish information on the geography, economy, and historical and cultural traditions of each county.

O'Donovan's Reports and Letters

Part of the output of the Ordnance Survey was the Memoirs, compiled by various establishment figures living in the locality, such as John Barrett for the parish of Inishkeel in mid-west Donegal. In his report, consisting of replies to questions from the North West Farming Society, Barrett gives invaluable descriptions of his own locality under many broad headings, such as 'Natural State and Productive Economy'; 'Natural Features'; 'Productive Economy'; 'Social Economy'; and 'Modern Topography'. Within those broad sections he describes specific subjects, such as wages, irrigation, livestock, rivers and lakes, houses and fuel, food, health and so on. Under his 'Description of the People' Barrett describes the working and living conditions of the native Irish in that part of County Donegal:

"From what I have already stated, it is evident that the situation of the inhabitants as to domestic comforts is very bad. I think their want of industry may be attributed to their want of a stimulus to their exertions, no resident gentry, not a man possessing the fee to a single acre of land living in the parish.

"When the wretched cottager has planted his potatoes, he rests from his labours from the period of digging them. From that period till spring little labour is done; for in many parts of the parish there are none who want to hire a labourer. Add to these causes the facility of procuring another, cheapness of illicit whiskey, many domestic comforts are not to be expected.

"Many things combine to render the inhabitants of this parish less comfortable than our English neighbours. I resided many years in England. I think our want of manufactures is the primary cause: few, very few, are the means of earning money in this parish; but when by servitude at home or in Scotland (whither many go annually) a small sum of money is earned, it is expended on the purchase of a farm from some of those who annually emigrate to America. They then marry and entail misery on a family".[188]

On the topic of food, Barrett describes the difference in diet between the farm owners and their labourers. For farmers, their diet consisted of: "*Potatoes, milk, butter, eggs, salted fish, oaten bread, on Sundays probably salted beef or poultry, but I am sorry to add there are very few of that description in this district, not 100".* In contrast, the diet of labourers consisted of: *"Potatoes with milk for four months, potatoes with salt too frequently for the remaining eight months".*[189]

That John Barrett is giving a critical description of the precarious living conditions in pre-famine Ireland is evident. He adds what he thinks is the simple solution: to bring manufacturing into the area.

O'Donovan's work necessitated fieldwork over the entire country, much of it undertaken on foot, in harsh weather conditions and with meagre pay. In addition to his topographical reports, he regularly sent letters back to Larcom at the Phoenix Park headquarters, in which he described his itinerary, requested supplies and gave details of his progress. A fascinating aspect of his letters comes from his observations and descriptions of rural landscapes and people in Ireland at that time, and the insight he gives as to his own opinions and sympathies.

O'Donovan's descriptions of the local people in mid-west Donegal, his analysis of the social problems and his proposals for reform, are far more radical and prophetic than Barrett's, as the following extracts from his letters from County Donegal show,

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[188] A Day, and P McWilliams (eds.), *Ordnance Survey Memoirs*, vol. 39, Parishes of County Donegal II, 1835-6, Mid, West and South Donegal (Belfast, 1997), p. 71. A reference to the purchase of a farm does not indicate purchase of the fee simple, but rather purchase of a 'tenancy interest'.
[189] *Ibid.,* p. 71.

"On the road we met crowds of the women of the mountains . . . who were loaded with stockings going to the fair at Dunglow, and who bore deep graven on their visages the effects of poverty and smoke, of their having been kept alive by the potato only, that Raleigh-introduced Cobbett-hated root[190] *. . . which has so much increased the population and the wretchedness of the Isle of Saints and Gallowglasses. Why do I say increased the population? Because an Irish peasant expects nothing but the potato, and when he finds himself master . . . of as much land as will produce a sufficient quantity of these roots to support himself and another, he immediately becomes anti-Malthusian – he marries, and contributes largely to the multiplication of the Celtic Stock, still looking to the potato as the sole support. But woe when storms rush from the angry ocean destroying the stalk of the Batata and causing grisly famine to stalk across the land with giant strides.*

"What then can be done? Keep the Aristocrat at home and compel him to cultivate the extensive heathy plain which the peasant at present dare not, cannot, has not means to touch. Continue such work for ten years and wilderness will be converted into a garden. The present state of things must end in general destruction. It was easy to support one million, which was the greatest population in Ireland in the time of Elizabeth and James, but now that it approaches ten millions the plan must be altered, the land must all be tilled".[191]

O'Donovan's letter writing is infused with political and historical commentary, but is also rich in imagery and humour and, despite the obvious discomforts of his travels, he displays an empathy for the people, the land, the placenames, the history and the language he is describing.

In another letter written about his travels in Donegal he composes an amusing 90-line poem about a bull legend associated with Lough Finn, no doubt inspired by his meeting with a real one on his way to Glenties earlier that day,

"On this bridge stood the patriarch of the mountain herd, a huge bull fierce and terrible to prevent our passage. The unusual sight of human form raised his anger, he roared, and the black valley resounded to his voice".

He goes on to describe how his companion urged him to run from the bull, necessitating their crossing a water-filled bog,

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[190] Sir Walter Raleigh is attributed with introducing the potato to Ireland in 1589. William Cobbett, a nineteenth-century English journalist and farmer, claimed that potatoes should only be fed to pigs, not people, and that they were the cause of *'slovenliness, filth, misery and slavery'*.

[191] M Herity (ed.), *Ordnance Survey Letters, Donegal* (Dublin, 2000).

" I returned towards the bridge again, determined to gain the road despite the defender of the gap . . . I crossed the bog and gained the road before the enemy perceived me . . . I then ran up the hill like a goat, and gained the precipice, which a tiger cat could scarcely climb. He looked and threatened but, seeing me out of danger, he only stood to watch my motions".

In the same letter he describes the difficult terrain, the appalling weather and other discomforts he had to endure in his search for a bed at the end of the day:

"We proceeded on our journey determined to reach Dunglow but before we advanced one mile night closed around us, and the clouds descended from the mountain into the valley. No house appeared, no speaking animal met our view, nothing but a heathy bog or mountain extending ten miles in every direction, no distant house showed its bright candle through the gloom".

Coming to a fork in the road, he and his companion took the wrong turn,

"We kept the wide and better road, and soon met a human face which speaking Celtic through the wind-driven mist informed us that we had left our destined road behind, and that we were on our way to Glenties, which was now six miles to the south west far behind the mountains, but that all between was heath and bog. I heard such words with grief".

And there was no respite for poor O'Donovan, even when he finally arrived at Dunglow the next day, for he further complained, *"I am wearied to death's door of the noise and interruption of drunken fishermen at the head-inn of Dunglow".*

But, having experienced some of the harshness of the conditions suffered by the local people, he is sympathetic to their plight:

"The inhabitants of these glens and mountains are fair specimens of what the Irish were in times of yore . . . They have no idea of comfort . . . It is probable that their condition is worse now than in ancient Irish times before the introduction of peace and the potato. Their comfortless condition and their awe of religion render them moral".[192]

However, the humour that O'Donovan's writing sometimes displayed was not always appreciated by his superiors: *"His letters, departmental as well as private, sparkle with a humour that ranges from the donnish to the faux-naïf; eventually Larcom reprimanded him for defacing official documents with 'ribaldry' and he agreed to make all his future communications 'very serious, cold and un-Irish' ".*[193]

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[192] *Ibid.*

[193] JH Andrews, *A Paper Landscape, The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), p. 123.

Notwithstanding O'Donovan's, at times, light-hearted and humorous writing, the work which he and his colleagues were engaged in, has been described in the following way,

"The doggedness of the majority of those involved in the Ordnance Survey, and the remarkable interest in Irish culture and history brought to the scheme by men such as O'Donovan, O'Curry and George Petrie . . . transformed it into one of the most significant and well-organised intellectual endeavours of the nineteenth century".[194]

As for Eugene O'Curry's work on the Ordnance Survey, he primarily had a desk job and was involved in the study and interpretation of Irish manuscripts, but in the summer months he, too, travelled around the country, collecting information for the Survey.

The Closure of the Topographical and Historical Department

By the time the Topographical and Historical Department of the Survey was controversially disbanded in 1842, both men had built up considerable experience and expertise in their translation works and, despite their strong connections, collaborations and interactions with Anglo-Irish antiquarians, had retained their empathy with their own people.

The closure aroused a great deal of criticism, for much work remained to be done. Addressing a Commission of Enquiry in 1844, into the work of the Ordnance Survey and its closure, James Henthorn Todd, of Trinity College Dublin had this to say:

". . . One very peculiar value of the labours of the Ordnance Survey in Ireland has been the preparation of an accurate and copious list of the ancient names of the places, with their ancient spellings, both their Irish and their Anglicised forms, tracing them also through the different spellings which they assumed at different times in English documents, and thus identifying them with the modern names. Such a list is of immense value to all who are engaged in the study of Irish history, and removes one of the principle difficulties which a student of our ancient records has to contend with".

Clive Dewey[195] claims that O'Curry was dismissed from the Ordnance Survey because his research had nationalist undertones; and SA[196] claims that, after the publication of the

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[194] M Burke, *History, Culture and Memory, Review of Gillian M Doherty's The Irish Ordnance Survey*, The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies; vol. 30, no. 1 (Spring, 2004), pp. 90-92.
[195] *Celtic, Agrarian Legislation and the Celtic Revival: Historical Implications of Gladstone's Irish and Scottish Land Acts 1870-1886, Past and Present,* no. 64 (Aug., 1974).
[196] SA, op. cit., p. 199.

Ordnance Memoir of Londonderry in 1839, *"The Treasury demurred at the cost; the revival of old animosities that might result from indicating the ancient territories and the danger of re-opening questions of Irish local history, were urged as objections to the completion of the work; and though remonstrances were made on every side, and a mass of evidence in favour of the continuance of the undertaking was elicited in the course of the parliamentary enquiry into the Ordnance Memoir of Ireland, all was in vain. The staff was discharged, and the vast mass of material which had been collected, including, it is said , 'upwards of four hundred quarto volumes of letters and documents, relating to the topography, language, history, antiquities, productions and social state of almost every county of Ireland' were stowed away".*

The Brehon Law Commission

Edward O'Reilly[197] in his address on behalf of the Royal Irish Academy in 1824,[198] had set out the reasons as to why antiquarians should be interested in studying the Brehon Laws of Ireland:

" . . . to understand the form of government among the ancient Irish . . . and we shall have a very delightful and instructive view of many ancient rites and customs of this country, which as yet continue in the utmost darkness and obscurity. . . Therefore if they (i.e. the laws) have not suffered some very material changes in the lapse of ages, they must, it may be presumed, exhibit a faithful picture of ancient opinions, customs and manners, that may tend to elucidate the history, antiquities, manners and customs of several continental nations, deriving their origin from the same source as the ancient Irish".[199]

In 1852, succumbing to requests from antiquarians such as the Revd Dr Todd, the Revd Dr Graves, both Fellows of Trinity College Dublin,[200] arising from their continued interest in ancient manuscripts and, in particular, those containing the now obsolete laws of Ireland, the British government set up a Royal Commission, which became known as The Brehon Law Commission. The secretary of the Commission was the Very Revd Charles Graves,[201]

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[197] E O'Reilly (1765-1830) was another eminent Irish language scholar, who published an Irish-English dictionary in 1817 and catalogued and translated many rare Irish manuscripts into English. He also collected Irish music and worked at the Ordnance Survey. Upon his death, John O'Donovan filled the vacancy that his demise had created at the Survey.

[198] E O'Reilly, *An Essay on the Nature and Influence of the Ancient Irish Institutes, Commonly Called Brehon Laws, and on the Number and Authenticity of the Documents Whence Information concerning Them May Be Derived, Accompanied by Specimens of Translations from Some of Their Most Interesting Parts,* The Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. 14 (1825), pp. 141-226.

[199] *Ibid.,* p. 150

[200] S Bryant, *Liberty, Order and Law, a Study in the Book of the Ancient Laws of Ireland* (New York, 1923).

[201] He was the grandfather of Robert Graves, the poet and author.

TTCD, Dean of the Chapel Royal. Other members included George Petrie, four landlords, three government law officers, three Church of Ireland clergy and one career officer in the English Army.[202]

Heather Laird points out that among the arguments put forward by the proposers was one that the ancient laws might have relevance for the current times, and could help the government to understand the Irish psyche, as the spirit of the old laws was still evident among the Irish population.

"In the debates that accompanied the state-sponsored project in the latter half of [the nineteenth] century to transcribe, edit and translate the Brehon Laws, repeated reference is made to the contemporary relevance of those laws. The proposal that James Todd and Charles Graves submitted to the government in 1852 seeking financial backing for that project vindicates the expenses that will be incurred on the grounds that the Brehon Laws may be found to have important bearings upon the existing condition of society in Ireland. Other commentators believed that the Irish people still adhered to many of the principles contained in the laws and that by publishing them politicians could understand the Irish psyche, especially with regard to the question of land."[203]

O'Curry and O'Donovan appointed as translators

Having attempted, without success, to translate the manuscripts from within their own Anglo-Irish ranks, the Commissioners decided to hire two Irish-speaking editors from the native Irish Catholic population *viz* Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan. According to Clive Dewey,

"The first Brehon Law Commissioners were straight-forward representatives of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy . . . but the editors they employed were Irish Catholics whose native tongue was Gaelic . . . [and who] served as intermediaries between the traditional Irish culture of their birth and the Anglo-Irish culture of their patrons".[204]

He also points out that those same Anglo-Irish antiquarians had been responsible for the setting up of the Topographical and Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey, and

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[202] The Commissioners were: the Right Honourable Francis Blackburne, the Lord Chancellor of Ireland; the Right Honourable William, Earl of Rosse; the Right Honourable Edwin Richard Wyndham, Earl of Dunraven and Mount-Earl; the Right Honourable James, Lord Talbot de Malahide; the Right Honourable David Richard Pigot, Lord Chief Baron of Her Majesty's Court of Exchequer; the Right Honourable Joseph Napier, her Majesty's Attorney General for Ireland; the Rev Thomas Romney Robinson, DD; the Rev James Henthorne Todd, DD; the Rev Charles Graves, DD; George Petrie, LLD; and Major Thomas Larcom.

[203] H Laird, *Subversive Law in Ireland, 1879-1920* (Dublin, 2005), p. 23.

[204] C Dewey, *op. cit.,* p. 44.

for the growing collection of manuscripts housed at Trinity College Dublin. Without their interest and support, the British government would not have financed the Brehon Law Commission.

The Politicisation of the Ancient Laws

However, Dewey also maintains that even before the publication of the first volume of the manuscript translations, the Fenian movement had harnessed this aspect of what was to become known as The Celtic Revival to its political aims, with the result that Anglo-Irish involvement ceased, and that, *"save for a handful of dedicated scholars, the Anglo-Irish resumed their conventional condemnation of early Irish society as 'barbarous' . . . and newly formed associations of nationalists, such as the Celtic Society (1843), the Ossianic Society (1852) and the Gaelic Union (1878) were bodies 'hostile to the cultural consequences of Anglo-Irish ascendancy, rather than associations of antiquarians for the recovery of a remote, idealised past' ".*[205]

In other words, the translations of the Brehon Law texts were becoming very controversial, with sides being drawn up on either side of the political divide.

O'Curry's Lectures

O'Donovan and O'Curry continued for several years to transcribe, edit and translate the legal texts, work made difficult by the fact that much of the language was obsolete and the handwriting difficult to read. During this period, some years before the publication of the first volume in 1865, O'Curry gave a series of lectures[206] in which he was critical of the standard of Irish legal history scholarship to date:

". . . of all the writers who have published books on the subject, up to the time of delivering these Lectures, – some of them large and elaborate, – not one wrote who had ever acquired the necessary qualifications, or even applied himself at all to the necessary study, without which, as I think I have established beyond a doubt, the History of Ireland could not possibly have been written. All were ignorant . . . of the greater part of the records and remains of which I have here, for the first time, endeavoured to present a comprehensive and in some sort a connected account".[207]

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[205] *Ibid.,* p. 54.
[206] E O'Curry, *Lectures on the Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* (Dublin, 1860). The lectures had been delivered to his students at the Catholic University of Dublin from 1855-56.
[207] *Ibid.,* p. ix.

Obviously, O'Curry is warning his students, and future readership, that the history of Ireland, up until that point, had essentially been written by the victors, devoid of historical facts.

He was also critical of those who had presided over the destruction of so many ancient manuscripts, including Vikings; Anglo-Norman invaders; and English and Scottish Planters, the latter by forcing Gaelic Chieftains from their lands and ensuring an end to their patronage of Gaelic culture. Indeed, he states that it is incredible, given the destruction and repression to which the manuscripts were subjected, that any should have survived at all. Additionally, their inaccessibility, whether because they were destroyed, hidden or taken abroad for safekeeping, resulted in the almost complete loss of knowledge of the ancient Irish language in which they were written.

O'Curry's lectures[208] provide a strong indication that, although he was employed by the Anglo-Irish establishment members of the Brehon Law Commission, and was paid by the British government, he was uncompromising when it came to his own political and cultural allegiances: he was fairly and squarely on the side of the native Irish. Unlike in Charles O'Conor's time, he had the freedom to express his political views, as the Penal Laws were no longer in force. In addition, in the same spirit of the tolerance shown by Charles O'Conor, he acknowledged the role of some sections of the Anglo-Normans in supporting and adopting Gaelic culture in times past:

"Not only were the old Irish nobility, gentry and people in general, lovers of their native language and literature, and patrons of literary men, but even the great Anglo-Norman nobles who effected a permanent settlement among us, appear from the first to have adopted what doubtless must have seemed to them the better manners, customs, language and literature of the natives . . . so that the Geraldines, the Butlers, the Burkes, the Keatings, and others, spoke and wrote in the Gaedhlic, and stored their libraries with choice and expensive volumes in that language: and they were reproached by their own compatriots with having become 'ipsis Hibernis Hiberniores' – more Irish than the Irish themselves. So great indeed was the value in those days set on literary and historical documents by chiefs and princes, that it has more than once happened that a much-prized MS was the stipulated ransom of a captive noble, and became the object of a tedious warfare; and this state

[208] When O'Curry's lectures were published in 1860, he had been working on the transcriptions and translations for the Brehon Law Commission for seven years. In 1873, some eleven years after his death, other lectures that he had delivered were brought together and published in three volumes under the title *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*). See E O'Curry, *On the Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* (New York, 1971).

of things continued to exist for several centuries, even after the whole framework of Irish society was shaken to pieces by successive invasions of Danes, the Norsemen, and the Anglo-Normans, followed by the Elizabethan, Cromwellian and Williamite wars and confiscations, and accompanied by the ever increasing dissentions of the native princes among themselves, disunited as they were ever after the fall of the supreme monarchy at the close of the twelfth century".[209]

Despite the vandalism and destruction outlined by O'Curry, many manuscripts did survive. Those legal ones transcribed by him, and John O'Donovan, dated from the twelfth – fourteenth centuries, and were copies of original works dating from the seventh century. As such, they not only contained verbatim replicas of the original works, in what was now an obsolete version of the Gaelic language, but also contained glosses and commentaries written by various legal scribes down through the centuries.

The Content and Publication of the Ancient Laws and Institutions of Ireland

The Brehon Law Commission published the first of its five volumes of the *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland* in 1865, but sadly, neither O'Curry nor O'Donovan lived to see their work completed. John O'Donovan had died of rheumatic fever at the age of fifty-five years, in December 1861. O'Curry survived him by only seven months. On their deaths, their work for the Commission was taken over by WN Hancock and AG Richey, Professors of Political Economy and Jurisprudence respectively at Trinity College Dublin, neither of whom were native Gaelic speakers and both of whom came from the Anglo-Irish community. The work was finally completed and published in 1901 by Robert Atkinson, Professor of Comparative Philology at TCD, an academic, criticised for being more interested in the philology of the manuscripts than their legal content.

Volume I of the Ancient Laws contained the *Senchus Mór* (or Great Tradition). Published in 1865, it was followed by four more volumes between then and 1901. The second and third volumes dealt with more translations from the *Senchus Mór*, concerning such legal issues as the law of distress; the law of hostage sureties; the law of fosterage; the law of tenure and the law of social connections. Volume III also contained the *Corus Bescna*, or *Customary Law* and the *Book of Aicill*, which describes the ordinary lives of people. Volume IV deals with the Irish family and clan system, including land law, and the rights and duties of clan and *fine* (kin group) members. Volume V contains the *Uraicecht Becc* (or *Small Primer*) and deals with the important topics of status and rank.

[209] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

The most important of the legal translations was the *Senchus Mór*. O'Curry explains that it was compiled in the year 439 AD, under the direction of three Kings, three bishops and three poets, as a result of St Patrick's request that all the existing laws of Ireland up to that date be gathered together and modified to comply with the teachings of Christ, where appropriate. As O'Curry states in his lectures,

" . . . these alterations were approved of, adopted, and embodied in the ancient code; and . . . that code thus amended was established as the National Law throughout the land".[210]

A love of justice, over and above the might of law, is a recurring theme in the content and study of Brehon Law. It was alluded to in the *Senchus Mór* in this way *"As the house protects a person against the cold and inclement weather, so the law and the knowledge of the Senchus protect a person against injustice and against ignorance . . .".*[211]

Justice being at the core of the Brehon Laws was, as we saw in Chapter 2, acknowledged by Sir John Davies in the seventeenth century, when he wrote, *"There is no nation of people under the sunne that doth love equal and indifferent justice; or will rest better satisfied with the execution thereof, although it bee against themselves; so as they may have protection and benefit of the lawe when upon just cause they do desire it."*[212]

Edward O'Reilly, responding to disparaging English commentators on the Brehon Laws, invoked the importance of justice when he said that *". . . the Irish institutes were founded in reason and justice; that they were administered with strict impartiality, and, consequently, that they afforded protection to all classes of people without distinction and were productive of happiness and comfort to the nation, leaving none in distress or in a state of pauperism".*[213]

Justice was also held out as a *sine qua non* of any legal system by Hancock and O'Mahony, in their Preface to the second volume of the English Translation of the Ancient Laws, published in 1869, when they suggest that the test of jurists regarding the great object of law is *"not merely to settle disputes as they arise, but to infuse into the hearts of people a love of justice*".[214]

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[210] *Ibid.,* p. 16.
[211] WN Hancock and T O'Mahony, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland*, Volume I (Dublin and London, 1865), pp. 33-37.
[212] Sir J Davies, *op. cit.,* p. 283.
[213] E O'Reilly, *op. cit.,* p. 142.
[214] Hancock and O'Mahony, *op. cit.,* vol. II, p. xl.

And in the twentieth century, the concept of the primacy of justice within Brehon Law was acknowledged by Irish nationalist and Brehon Law scholar, Eoin MacNeill, who was in no doubt that *"Irish law worked well, that it produced among the common people a satisfaction with its operation and with the measure of justice and peace that it brought into their lives".*[215]

The effect of the Ancient Laws publications was profound. Although the translations were criticised for being inaccurate, the work formed the basis for further study in a wide range of disciplines, including Celtic studies, philology, legal jurisprudence and Irish history. In the field of politics the work engendered great national pride and, during and after the War of Independence, it gave confidence to Irish nationalists to experiment with alternative legal structures and laws, and to establish the Dáil (or Sinn Féin) Courts.[216] In those Courts, Brehon Law, as well as other legal sources, could be cited if appropriate (although they were not legally binding); however, any legal text published in Great Britain was banned.[217]

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[215] E MacNeill, *Early Irish Laws and Institutions* (London, 1935), p. 151.

[216] See JP Casey, *The Genesis of the Dáil Courts of Justice of the Irish Republic, 1920-1922,* Irish Jurist, (New Series), vol. 9 (1974), pp. 326-38. Casey informs us that in 1919, Dáil Éireann decreed that National Arbitration Courts should be established in every county, a policy advocated by Sinn Féin, which had made huge electoral gains in the 1918 election. These Courts operated as an alternative to, and in defiance of, the established Courts of the British government. Originally operating solely as Arbitration Courts, they derived their authority from the agreement of the parties concerned and so were, technically, lawful. Gradually they extended their remit beyond arbitration. On 29 June, 1920, the Minister for Home Affairs, Arthur Griffith, asked the Dáil to adopt Decree no. 5, establishing Courts of Justice and Equity, and Criminal Courts where required, thereby opening up the establishment of the Parish Courts, District Courts and Supreme Court system. By that time, Sinn Féin Courts were already operating in every county except Antrim, Armagh, Derry and Down. See also JP Casey, *Republican Courts in Ireland 1919-1922*, Irish Jurist, (New Series), vol. 5 (1970), p. 321 and C Davitt, *The Civil Jurisdiction of the Courts of Justice of the Irish Republic, 1920-1922,* Irish Jurist (New Series) vol. 3, (1968), pp. 112-130.

[217] Davit informs us (at p. 120) that, with regard to sources of law, the Decree stipulated that *"The law as recognised on the 21st January, 1919, shall, until amended continue to be enforced, except such portion thereof as was clearly motivated by religious or political animosity . . . Without prejudice to the foregoing, and pending the enactment of a Code by An Dáil, citation may be made to any Court from the Early Irish Law Codes or any commentary upon them in so far as they may be applicable to modern conditions, and from the Code Napoléon and other Codes, the Corpus Juris Civilis, and works embodying or commenting on Roman Law, but such citations shall not be of binding authority. Save as aforesaid, no legal textbook published in Great Britain shall be cited to any Court."* He later says, however, (at p. 126) that, *"[l]ittle advantage was taken of the provision enabling citation to be made from the early Irish law codes, the Code Napoléon or the Corpus Juris Civilis".* See also T Mohr, *Salmon of Knowledge*, Peritia, vol. 16 (2002), pp. 360-395, for details of cases heard in the Irish Courts in the 1930s and 1940s, which admitted evidence concerning Brehon Law fishery rights to help with the interpretation of the modern law concerning same.

O'Curry's and O'Donovan's work also inspired theoretical alternatives to mainstream legal jurisprudence in international legal circles. And the translations, flawed though they were, led other legal and linguistic scholars to improve on their initial ground-breaking work of translating and interpreting the laws, and the political and social structures of ancient Ireland.

However, by the time of the publication of the third volume, the tone and content of the Preface and Introduction, in this case written by Thaddeus O'Mahony and Alexander George Richey, were far from enthusiastic about the content of the Ancient Laws. The Commissioners had given pre-publication access to an English legal academic, Sir Henry Maine, whose views were that the Brehon Laws were not an advanced system of laws, but consisted of the backward customs of an uncivilised race, similar to Hindu Law.[218]

Maine's views, according to one modern commentator, were *"dressed up as scientific propositions"*, and *"were very well received in England, which is not surprising given that by implication they located his Victorian readership at the very top of the civilised, evolutionary tree"*.[219]

For Maine, progress and civilisation were inextricably linked, by the domination of one group in society by another, or of one country by another. Although he maintained that he was a neutral commentator, his antipathy for ancient Irish law is evident throughout his lectures. He acknowledged that the translations of the ancient laws of Ireland were interesting from a comparative law point of view, if only because they contained a complete lack of influence by Roman Law, and that they opened a window on all primitive people. When comparing Brehon Law with Hindu Law, he criticises both for the 'barbarous' practices, such as the Indian practice of 'sitting dharma' i.e. of fasting at a debtor's door in order to exact payment from a creditor, and the similar Brehon Law practice of fasting outside an offender's house.[220]

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[218] See H Maine, *Lectures on the Early History of Institutions* (1875), p. 12.

[219] S Kilcommins, *The Historical School of Jurisprudence*, in T Murphy (ed.), Western Jurisprudence (Dublin, 2004), pp. 144-167 at p.159.

[220] He failed to explain that under Brehon Law, fasting was a symbolic action, undertaken during daylight hours, and was not intended to induce death. The person fasting (a commoner) did so outside the house of the alleged perpetrator (a Lord or a King), who was also expected to fast. *"If he eats while the claimant is fasting, he must pay twice the debt. A King or Lord who refuses to respond to a just fast is described as an evader of the law and loses his honour-price. So fasting was quite clearly a powerful sanction for the weak to get their legal rights from the strong." (Unpublished source:* F Kelly, *'Offences'*, *Brehon Law in Modern Times,* Lectures delivered to the Professional Practice Course II, Law Society of Ireland (Dublin, 2004), pp. 11-15).

Maine's views were consistent with his uncritical acceptance of England's right to colonise both Ireland and India. The idea that one country had legitimate authority to impose its own laws, by violence and force, on another country was never questioned. But, in the face of both Indian and Irish political resistance to colonisation in his day, Maine (and the British government) had to find additional ways of justifying, and maintaining, that dominance. What better way than to denigrate the laws of the dominated country, but in a way that was academically acceptable. Maine disingenuously passed himself off as a neutral observer, almost as a moderator, of the invective of Spenser and Davies in the past.

Jane Hook is a modern commentator on the criticisms of the Brehon Laws, as displayed by the editors, O'Mahony and Richey, in the Introduction to Volume III of the Ancient Laws. They maintained that the laws: (a) lacked general principles; (b) failed to recognise the legal identity of the individual; (c) lacked an advanced system of contract law; and (d) failed to demonstrate a progressive nature by introducing changes. In response to those claims Hook argues that, (a) the general principles are obvious, though implied; (b) the individual's legal identity, concerning for example legal liability, is tied up with his or her membership of a kin-group, but exists nevertheless; (c) the Brehon Laws demonstrate an extremely advanced system of contract law; and (d) changes to the laws *were* made, but the editors dismissed these as an 'abnormal development'.[221]

While Hook's article is insightful, it fails to take account of the political environment within which the editors were working. As noted above, the Topographical and Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey had been shut down by the British government in 1842, because of fears that the information being uncovered could give, and indeed was giving, rise to political and nationalist awareness and unrest among the native Irish. When the same government set up the Brehon Law Commission, on the urgings of Anglo-Irish antiquarians that the government would benefit from the revelations contained within the Ancient Laws, it failed to realise that a similar awakening could result within the nationalist community. The *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland* publications became a pawn in a war between those advocating nationalism and those seeking to maintain the establishment of British rule in Ireland.

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[221] J Hook, *Nineteenth-Century Positivist Legal Theory: A Barrier to Interpreting the early Irish Law-texts*, eLaw Journal, vol. 15 (2008), pp. 124-133 at p. 125.

The *Ancient Laws* publications were commandeered by nationalists, forcing the Anglo-Irish into retreat, as the latter would have been extremely uncomfortable sharing a historical identity with such militant nationalism. It can be argued, therefore, that it became necessary to devalue the credibility of the *Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland*, a theory which goes some way to explain the *volte face* of O'Mahony, whose co-authored 'Preface' to Volume I, published in 1865, differs so markedly from the 'General Preface and Introduction' in Volume III, published in 1873, which he also co-authored.

The Introduction to Volume IV of the *Ancient Laws* continues in the same vein as that of Volume III. In the first few sentences of his 'Introduction', editor AG Richey states,

"The idea of law in its technical sense was wholly foreign to the ancient lawyers. They dealt not with laws, but customs; which, of unknown origin, handed down from remote antiquity, often obscure, and frequently misconceived, influenced the public opinion of each tribal community as to what it was right should be done in each particular case. The Brehons were gradually approaching the idea of general legal propositions by an induction from numerous and distinct cases which had been decided in accordance with pre-existing customs".[222]

By now, conscious of the potential for agitation and unrest that knowledge of the ancient Gaelic ways, traditions and even place names could evoke in the hearts and minds of the nineteenth-century Irish population, the editors could be accused of desperately trying to hold back a rising tide of nationalism. As already stated, the Topographical and Historical Department of the Ordnance Survey had been closed down mid-term, most probably for those same reasons. But the Anglo-Irish, and the British, had failed to learn an important lesson from that venture. Now, once again, the genie had been released from the lamp, this time by the publication of the Ancient Laws of Ireland, and once again the work of O'Donovan and O'Curry was at the centre of the unleashed storm.

Nationalist reaction was swift. By 1872 (the date of publication of the third volume of *Ancient Laws),* the Fenian Rising had taken place and the Irish Republican Brotherhood was busy organising for another confrontation with England.

The positive views of one contemporaneous commentator, Laurence Ginnell (1852-1923),[223] displayed his approval of the Brehon Laws' non-prescriptive approach to law, in

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[222] AG Richey, (ed.), *Introduction,* Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland, Vol. IV (Dublin and London, 1879), p. vii.

[223] Laurence Ginnell was a barrister and MP for the Irish Parliamentary Party and, later, Sinn Féin. In the House of Commons he called the British Prime Minister a 'murderer' after the executions of

that they stated what *ought* to be done (rather than imperatively stating what *must* be done), while still maintaining authority by citing the wise decisions of previous cases. He contrasted this approach with the laws of other legal systems that maintained their authority by enforcing harsh commands on pain of severe punishment for non-compliance. He also commented that,

"It followed as a natural consequence that these laws were obeyed and venerated as the spirit by which the nation ought to be ruled. There was therefore no occasion for the imperative, none for coercion . . . Besides, these laws, having been made by the nation itself were, of course, designed to promote and secure its wellbeing and happiness, and were therefore broadly just and generally found favourable to every good purpose".[224]

The translations not only invoked a modern sense of national pride (as comes through in Ginnell's writing), but also an accompanying antagonism towards the Anglo-Irish (one legacy of their work which would probably not have met with the approval of O'Donovan and O'Curry), as Ginnell's writing also demonstrates,

"No credit whatsoever is due to Trinity College as an institution for the preservation of the legal or other ancient documents now stored there. When it was dangerous to preserve them, they were preserved by Irish peasants in spite of the danger, in spite of the system of government which created the danger and of which Trinity College was a part and an instrument: and it was only when Ireland's darkest age, which Trinity College had heralded, was coming to an end, that most of those ancient documents reached their present resting-place".[225]

The decades-long efforts of the 'Old Irish' antiquarians, without whose support and collaboration the laws would never have been published, were soon forgotten in the outpouring of nationalist emotion that would, just twenty or so years after Ginnell's publication,[226] result in a nationalist revolution and a war of independence.

And Ginnell had this to say about academics who refused to acknowledge the evidence of the culture of ancient Ireland now uncovered:

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the leaders of the 1916 Rising and was forcibly evicted from the House. He took an Anti-Treaty stance after the War of Independence.

[224] L Ginnell, *The Brehon Laws: a legal handbook* (London, 1894), p. 27.

[225] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[226] Ginnell's work was published in the period between the publication of Volume IV and Volume V of *The Ancient Laws and Institutes of Ireland*.

"Knowing that themselves they cannot err, they feel that the facts are perverse and have been got wrong somehow. They would willingly lavish money digging for such things in the debris of Greece or in the sands of Egypt, but if told of its existence in Ireland they duly shrug their shoulders and proceed to doubt and criticise instead of taking the trouble to learn".[227]

Ginnell's opinions were not held in isolation. The nationalist movement claimed this new, native Irish legacy for themselves, forcing the Anglo-Irish, with whom O'Donovan and O'Curry had for so long worked and collaborated, to back away and relinquish all hopes of forging a cultural identity of their own from the antiquarian and manuscript legacy of Ireland, despite their significant involvement in the discovery process, and despite O'Curry's recognition of Anglo-Norman patronage of Gaelic culture and law. As has been shown, some nationalists (such as Clive Dewey) went so far as to criticise O'Donovan and O'Curry for being too involved with the Anglo-Irish community, thus rendering themselves blind to the political implications of their work.

However, contrary evidence quoted earlier from O'Curry's lectures and O'Donovan's analysis of the plight of the rural Irish peasant, demonstrates that Dewey's argument on this point is without merit. Each was quite fearless in expressing his own critical view of the political, social and economic conditions of nineteenth-century Ireland, and the centuries of conquest before that. Indeed, as will be seen in the following Chapter of this book, the renowned Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, had read O'Curry's and O'Donovan's works and had corresponded with them. He went on to initiate several of their sons into the Irish Republican Brotherhood.[228]

A modern commentator on O'Donovan's work, the late playwright Brian Friel (who acknowledged O'Donovan's *Ordnance Survey Letters from Donegal* as a source for his play *Translations*), admired O'Donovan's scholarship and empathy for the common people:

"*[h]e was intelligent, diligent, scrupulous in his scholarship, loyal to his employers, considerate of his associates and genuinely sympathetic to the people he moved among".* However, regarding his work on the Ordnance Survey, Friel claimed that O'Donovan had:

[227] *Ibid.*, p. 36.
[228] O'Curry and O'Donovan, while not related themselves, married two sisters and became brothers-in-law; their off-spring thereby becoming cousins.

"*all the vigour and drive we associate with young men of the Victorian era who have the sense that they are participating in an important enterprise . . . and are determined to make a success of the tiny plot they have been allotted. By men like O'Donovan empires are forged".*[229]

This writer maintains that the contrary is the case. O'Donovan and O'Curry (like Charles O'Conor before them) never lost sight of the bigger picture, the native Gaelic agenda of abolishing discrimination against Catholics, eliminating poverty among the native Irish, and restoring Gaelic culture to the people of Ireland in an independent country. It can clearly be argued that, far from empires being built on the work of people such as O'Donovan and O'Curry, in fact, the demise of the British Empire in Ireland, its first colony, was hastened by their work.

Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan nurtured, protected and brought back to full flame the dying embers of Gaelic history and culture that Charles O'Conor had managed, despite terrible odds, to keep alight; and their torch was readily taken up, and rekindled, by the Irish nationalist movement, as will be seen in the following Chapter.

[229] Quoted in 'Foreword', Herity, *op. cit.*

Chapter Six

Pádraig Pearse (1879-1916)

THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER highlighted Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan's resistance to British rule in Ireland in the form of their pursuit of recovering Ireland's long-forgotten legal, social and political history, through their translations of the Brehon Laws and other ancient Gaelic manuscripts. In so doing, they added to the body of proof, previously uncovered by Charles O'Conor, that Ireland was not then, and never had been, the ignorant, uneducated, uncivilised country that England repeatedly insisted on claiming it was, as a justification for colonising it.

Gaelic society, in which Hugh O'Neill had been thoroughly immersed, and which he did his utmost to preserve by his use of cunning and military force against England, had ended abruptly with the loss of the Battle of Kinsale in 1602 and the Flight of the Earls in 1607. King Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth I had done their best to destroy Gaelic society and culture in its entirety, but the final, fatal blows came after their reigns. These occurred, firstly, at the start of the seventeenth century, with the Plantation of Ulster (1609), resulting in the complete destruction of the Brehon Laws under King James I (James VI of Scotland); and, secondly, at the end of that century, with the introduction of the Penal Laws (1695), which stripped Irish Catholics of very many rights, under the joint reigns of King William III and Queen Mary II.

Over the course of the following two hundred years, during which time wars, famines, evictions, disease, starvation and enforced emigrations decimated Ireland's native population, the determination to free the country from English domination never waned, even if the physical capacity and mental resolve of the population to do so had been profoundly weakened.

The Great Famine

The most devastating social event to take place in the nineteenth century was the Great Irish Famine of 1845-52. The potato blight of those years meant that those depending on that crop for survival, *viz* the landless agricultural tenants who had been dispossessed of their lands during the Plantations, had starved to death, or had died from malnutrition and hunger-related disease, even as they helped the landed gentry class to grow and harvest other crops for export to Britain. Those who survived, being unable to pay their rents to their wealthy, absentee, English landlords, were summarily and brutally evicted, had their humble homes burned down or demolished, and were forced to emigrate if they could, mostly to America and Britain, or die.

Set out below is one eye-witness account of some of the misery suffered by the Irish population during of the Famine. It was written by an American visitor to Ireland in 1848, a Universal Minister named Revd William Balch. He arrived by ship to Queenstown (now Cobh), County Cork in May of that year, and from there travelled to Tralee in County Kerry, where he witnessed the following:

"Tralee is situated in the bottom of a delightful valley . . . on the south, stretching off to the west, is a range of abrupt hills, covered with brown heather and dotted with white cabins and patches of tilled ground far up towards their summits. The town itself shows many signs of thrift I had not expected to see in this part of the country. Some of the streets are spacious and regularly laid out, and many houses are new and handsome, and the grounds about them are tastefully decorated. A fair proportion of the inhabitants are well dressed and genteel in their manners.

"I noticed many very handsome women sitting by their windows, reading, walking in the streets, or present in the church. I was surprised at such marks of refinement, so unlike the character of the people we have seen since leaving Cork. I am sorry to be compelled to add, however, that we also saw specimens of destitution, and misery, more horrid than any before described.

"In one place we saw an old woman lying on a sort of bed, which had been made of old rags, upon some boxes, by the side of a yard fence. Two sticks were stuck in the ground, on the top of which was placed an old door, the other side resting on the fence. This formed her only shelter. A ragged quilt was spread over her, which she wrapped closer about her as we came near. A dirty cap was on her head; beneath it her shrivelled, cadaverous face, faintly tinged with a hectic fever. One hand, withered to a skeleton, lay by her cheek on the course pillow of straw, which must have been gathered from the stable nearby. Close to her sat a middle aged and more decently dressed female, who might

have been her daughter. She begged of us, in the name of God, of the Blessed Saviour, and the Holy Virgin, in strong words which seemed familiar to her, bartering freely the rewards of heaven, for one poor ha'penny, for the sick and dying woman. The old lady muttered some words in answer to our enquiries, which were scarcely intelligible; indicating, however, that it was the 'will of God', and apparently trying to submit, as well as she could, to what she seemed to regard a dire necessity.

"One or two younger women, some with small children, gathered around us, perfect pictures of destitution, the most abject and loathsome. It was impossible for us to contemplate this scene of misery. We had not the nerve to listen to their tale of woe. What we saw was enough – too much almost, for human credulity. It was more, by far, than we believed possible in a Christian land; in a town of twelve thousand inhabitants and the capital of Kerry County, close by the elegant mansions of opulent merchants and landholders, where fashion and luxury make a fair display; and only a few rods from churches of various denominations, where God is professedly worshipped, in the name of the merciful Redeemer, who gave it as a witness of the divinity of his mission that 'the poor have the gospel preached to them', and made the standard of acceptance to the honours he came to bestow, 'I was hungered, and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink; naked and ye clothed me; a stranger, and ye took me in; I was sick, and ye visited me'; assuring them, that inasmuch as they had done it onto one of the least of his brethren, they had done it unto him.

"Mark our further astonishment, when, as we turned away from this place, we saw posted up, close by, and in many other places about the town, notices of a sermon and a collection for that day, to take place in the Methodist church, in aid of 'Foreign Missions'. My God! thought I, is it come to this, that these poor creatures – thy children – are to be laid on boards on the street, and left to starve, while Christians are called upon, in the name of religion, and the hopes of heaven, to give their substance to help convert the heathen?

"Here is a prolific soil, a genial climate, and every physical ability which a bountiful God could bestow; and yet, what heart-rending scenes of starvation and misery! What wails of oppression! What appalling horrors; what stoic indifference on the part of the better – sometimes the religious portion of the community; what inhuman neglect on the part of government, which pretends to exercise royal protection over her colonies!

"We turned from this horrid picture and went away to see some object to divert our minds and relieve us from the painful feelings which had overwhelmed us. We did not succeed. The elegance of some of the public buildings, the Court-house, the church, the Catholic chapels, the meeting house of Presbyterians and Methodists, the hospitals, the Union workhouse, the infantry barracks, the Green park, the fine bay – nothing could eradicate the impressions of that wretched family, which

inhumanity suffered to remain in the open street, under circumstances which appealed so forcibly to every generous and Christian feeling for sympathy and relief. More than once I turned to go back and cut short my means of travelling, by contributing sufficient to make them all comfortable. But then I felt what an insufficient thing is individual charity, where there is so much poverty and suffering. I cannot avert the evil, turn back the tide, or check the streams which are swelling constantly the flood of pauperism already spread so widely over this land. The root is deeper than I can reach, and useless is the effort of a stranger to do more than give a drop of comfort as he passes by".[230]

Harrowing and disturbing though this account undoubtedly is, it does not tell even half the story. Firstly, the 'Great Famine' is a misnomer. One definition of a famine is 'an extreme and general scarcity of food'. Judging by that definition, there was no famine in Ireland at that time. Ireland produced a plentiful supply of oats and grain, and enough other nutritious food to feed the entire population during the 'famine' period. But anything surplus to the requirements of those who could afford such foodstuffs was exported to England, often under armed military escort.

In the previous Chapter we saw descriptions of the diet of tenant farmers in south west Donegal, just a few years before the Famine, from John O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey report. Their diet was based solely on the humble potato, with the addition of milk for some four months of the year, and just salt for the rest of the year. Those who could afford to buy the diet of the wealthy landlords described in that same account (*viz* potatoes, milk, butter, eggs, salted fish, oaten bread, salted beef and poultry) did not go without the nutritious foodstuffs they were accustomed to during the so-called famine. Not alone that, Irish ports were blocked so as to prevent imports of foreign produce which could have kept the starving Irish alive for many years.

One of many researchers on the causes of the Famine in Ireland, Mark Thornton, comes to the following conclusions:

"In fact, the most glaring cause of the famine was not a plant disease, but England's long-running political hegemony over Ireland. The English conquered Ireland, several times, and took ownership of vast agricultural territory. Large chunks of land were given to Englishmen. These landowners in turn hired farmers to manage their holdings. The managers then rented small plots to the local

[230] Revd WS Balch, *Ireland as I saw it; the character, condition and prospects* (New York, 1850), pp. 162-165.

population in return for labour and cash crops. Competition for land resulted in high rents and smaller plots, thereby squeezing the Irish to subsistence and providing a large financial drain on the economy.

"Land tenancy can be efficient, but the Irish had no rights to the land they worked or to any improvements they might make. Only in areas dominated by Protestants did tenant farmers have any rights over their capital improvements. With the landlords largely residing in England, there was no one to conduct systematic capital improvements.

"The Irish suffered from many famines under English rule. Like a boxer with both arms tied behind his back, the Irish could only stand and absorb blow after blow . . ."

In his final summing up, Thornton says,

"Ireland was swept away by the economic forces that emanated from one of the most powerful and aggressive states the world had ever known. It suffered not from a fungus (which English scientists insisted was just excessive dampness) but from conquest, theft, bondage, protectionism, government welfare, public works and inflation".[231]

In fact, the government in England had anticipated the potato blight in Ireland, but had made no arrangements to alleviate its effect, relying instead on absentee landlords and economic market forces to do so, even though that same government had intervened with those same market forces to protect its own landowners. The resulting Corn Laws deliberately imposed tariffs on cheap foreign grain imports to Ireland, so as to ensure high prices for the exported corn and other grains of British farmers.

That same British government allowed impoverished Irish people to suffer starvation and fatal diseases, to die on the streets, in workhouses, in fever hospitals and in prisons. Those who did not die were often evicted from their homes and made homeless. And, if they could, if they had enough money and if they acted quickly enough, they emigrated, in great numbers, to America and Britain.

That same government permitted Irish landlords (the same landlords that they supposedly expected to help their tenants avoid starvation, disease, death and eviction) to refuse to help their tenants in any way; and that same government allowed those same Irish

[231] M Thornton, *What Caused the Irish Potato Famine?*, The Free Market (Apr., 1998), vol. 16, no. 4.

landlords to buy and hoard huge supplies of imported foods for their own use, and to sell it on for profit to those who could afford it.

Relief in the form of public works, authorised by that same government in England, was of no practical use. On the contrary, it inflicted great personal harm demanding, as it did, physical stamina that the weak and starving people just did not have. In addition, as most of the work concerned was piece work, rather than paid at an hourly rate, this supposed relief was just another example of cynical British cruelty and callous indifference, dressed up as charity; it simply added deaths from physical exhaustion to those caused by hunger and hunger-related disease. In short, the British government not alone allowed, but caused, the population of Ireland to be decimated.

Daniel Mulhall, former Irish ambassador to both the United States and the UK, points out that between 1845 and 1851,

"It is estimated that the Famine caused 1 million people to die from hunger or hunger-related disease. A further 1 million people emigrated. This meant that Ireland lost a quarter of its population during those terrible years. The Famine's impact was most severe in the west of Ireland where some counties lost more than 50 per cent of their population".[232]

Between 1841 and 1900, 6 million people left Ireland. Only in very recent times (as shown by the preliminary findings of the Irish census of 2022) has Ireland's population risen above pre-Famine levels.

Lest all the blame for this genocide (for that is not too strong a condemnation) of the Irish people rest solely with the British government, it should be noted that Britain's Head of State, Queen Victoria, was no better disposed to helping her Irish subjects than her government was.

Historian Christine Kinealy rejects any idea that Queen Victoria showed empathy or sympathy for her Irish subjects, although she conceded that the Queen did issue a Queen's Letter, asking Protestants to raise money for the Irish, a plea somewhat countered by The Times of London, which suggested that money sent to Ireland would be akin to throwing it into an Irish bog.

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[232] *https://www.dfa.ie/irish-embassy/usa/ambassadors-blog-black47irelandsgreatfamineanditsafter-effects.* Before his appointment as Irish Ambassador to the United States, Daniel Mulhall served as Ambassador to the United Kingdom (from 2013 -2017) and to several other countries.

Queen Victoria personally donated £2,000 in 1848, three years into the crisis.[233] However, this meant that no other individual donations in excess of that amount could be accepted by the British government, because royal protocol prohibited that the Queen should be seen to be less generous than others. For example, the leader of the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Khaleefah Abdul-Majid, offered £10,000 through diplomatic sources, but his generous offer was declined by the British government. Instead, therefore, he lowered his offer to £1,000, which was accepted. However, secretly, he sent three ships, laden with food, to alleviate the suffering in Ireland. And although England tried to block this consignment, it landed safely in Drogheda harbour.

Other States and organisations also found ways around the British government's cruel dictum. India sent £14,000. Americans sent money and ships laden with food. Assistance also came from newly liberated slaves in Jamaica, Barbados and other Caribbean islands. Prisoners in jails in New York sent money, as did the Choctaw Nation, and other native Americans, people who had personally suffered great hardship and had very little themselves.[234]

Kinealy sums up the feelings of many Irish people, and Irish Americans, concerning the British government's handling of the Famine in Ireland:

"To conclude, although the involvement of private charity was short-lived, it was vital to the survival of many. It proved to be particularly crucial as government relief was inadequate, provided with parsimony and reluctance, and constrained by views of the Irish poor as undeserving of assistance. In contrast, most private charity honoured the dignity of the recipient. Moreover, without those generous contributions, many more Irish people would have died during that tragic period".[235]

On the 150th anniversary of the Famine, in 1997, British Prime Minister Tony Blair issued a carefully constructed statement of regret for the British government's failures back then, but did not formally apologise. His statement said,

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[233] That was an increase on her alleged first offer of merely £5, a gesture which prompted the nickname 'The Famine Queen'.

[234] In 2021, when the Choctaw Nation issued an appeal for financial help during the Covid-19 crisis, many thousands of Irish people answered their call and gave generously, remembering the assistance that had been given to their ancestors by the Choctaw Nation during the Great Famine.

[235] *https://www.irishamerica.com/2009/08/international-relief-efforts-during-the-famine.*

"Those who governed in London at the time failed their people through standing by while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy. We must not forget such a dreadful event. It is also right that we should pay tribute to the ways in which Irish people have triumphed in the face of this catastrophe".[236]

The similarity of tone and content between his speech writer and that of Queen Elizabeth II on her visit to Ireland in 2011, as quoted in the Introduction to this book, is plain to be seen. It consists of the same double-speak, designed to mean everything, to be what the listener wants to hear, but in reality means nothing. But it was not only double-speak, it was actually downright lies. As has been shown above, it was not the crop failure that turned into a massive human tragedy. It was not even the British government's 'standing by' that caused the tragedy. It was the British government's failures, both by deliberate action and by criminal negligence, that produced the tragedy. Britain's recent prime minister, Tony Blair, speaking on behalf of the British nation, would have us believe differently.

After the Famine, Britain might have thought that the Irish question had now finally been dealt with but, if so, they were wrong. Sorrow, anger and resentment – but also a renewed determination – fuelled the attitudes and actions of many of those who were left behind, as well as those who had emigrated or been exiled. Far from breaking the spirit of the Irish people who survived, the Famine proved to be pivotal in Ireland's resistance to British rule. Campaigns to regain parliamentary independence from England, and to oust England from Ireland, many of which had commenced before the Famine, continued with more determination than ever. Set out below is a brief outline of some of those campaigns: the organisations involved, their inter-relationships and their outcomes.

The Campaigns for Catholic Emancipation and Repeal of The Union

Two peaceful campaigns, one for Catholic emancipation and the other for rescinding the union of Ireland with Britain, were led by Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847). O'Connell, born in County Kerry, came from a wealthy background, was an eloquent speaker, an MP and a barrister.

As we saw in the previous Chapter, following the Act of Union of 1800, the Irish parliament had been abolished and all matters concerning Ireland were dealt with at the British parliament in London. Although Ireland was entitled to elected representatives to

[236] *The Irish Times*, 2 June, 1997.

that parliament, they numbered no more than 100 out of a total of 658 Members of Parliament. In addition, no Catholics could sit at the Houses of Parliament at Westminster. Neither could they attain high office in the civil service, become judges, army colonels, navy captains or government ministers. Despite the prior assurances of William Pitt, the British Prime Minister at that time, that such restrictions would be abolished after the Act of Union was passed, they were not. So much for British pre-election promises.

The demand for Catholic emancipation was the first issue addressed by Daniel O'Connell. Adamant that the campaign should not resort to violence, he established the Catholic Association in 1823. Rather than relying on the upper and merchant classes in Ireland, the campaign became a mass movement of the lower classes. And, recognising that Catholic priests were located throughout the country, and that they knew, and were trusted by, their parishioners, O'Connell gained their support for the movement. A 'Catholic rent', a subscription of one penny a month affordable by even the poorest of the population, was the membership subscription. Soon, money was building up and people were actively supporting the campaign. One Church of Ireland bishop commented, *"There is what we of this generation have never before witnessed, a complete union of the Roman Catholic body . . . an Irish revolution has, in great measure, been effected"*.[237]

By means of tactical voting in the General Election of 1826, O'Connell showed that it was possible for candidates supporting Catholic emancipation to be elected; and they were so elected in the four constituencies targeted. Tenants who experienced financial recriminations for refusing to vote for their landlords, who then lost their seats in the election, were compensated from the movement's funds.

In 1828, at a by-election in County Clare, O'Connell himself stood for election. Although if elected he would automatically be barred from taking his seat, there were no rules against him standing. Voters were well organised by the clergy and Catholic Association officials, resulting in O'Connell winning the election by 2,057 votes to 982. The British government caved in and conceded the need for Catholic emancipation, not least because of fears of mass public disorder if they did not do so.

The Catholic Emancipation Act was duly introduced in 1829, allowing Catholics to enter parliament. However, true to British form and duplicity, it concealed an ulterior motive. It was designed so as to exclude small farmers from the scheme and actually ended up

[237] JA Reynolds, *The Catholic Emancipation of Ireland* (1954), p. 22.

disenfranchising more of the population than before. The number of Irish Catholics permitted to vote after 1829 fell from 216,000 to 37,000, owing to mainly Catholic small tenants, known as 'forty-shilling freeholders', losing their pre-existing right to vote. Nevertheless, O'Connell took a seat in the House of Commons and remained an MP for several years.

He later turned his attention to having the Act of Union repealed. If successful, this campaign would re-establish the Kingdom of Ireland, which would pay allegiance to the same monarch as the rest of Britain (at that time Queen Victoria), but would have its own parliament. He formed the Repeal Association in 1840, expecting that this campaign would succeed using the same tactics that had worked in the Catholic Emancipation campaign. But despite petitions, monster rallies and immense popular support, this time the government in London did not budge. Irish people flocked in their tens of thousands to the movement's public meetings, such as the one held at the Hill of Tara in 1843. This gathering was so well organised, and so large, that it prompted the British government to ban future ones. O'Connell's immediate compliance with this prohibition lost him much popular support from which the campaign did not recover. O'Connell's Repeal Movement was a failure. He had merely demonstrated that peaceful protest on its own, no matter how large and well supported, was insufficient to bring about change.

The Young Irelanders

Some younger members of the repeal movement, disillusioned with O'Connell's timidity in the face of England's intransigence, had decided to break away and form their own organisation, which they called the Young Irelanders. In 1842 their newspaper, *The Nation*, was founded by Thomas Davis, Charles Gavan Duffy and John Blake Dillon. Their intention was to create an organisation of Irishmen, irrespective of religion or social class, dedicated to the re-establishment of an Irish parliament, based on freedom, tolerance and truth. They did not openly espouse violence, but neither did they condemn it. With the onset of the Famine, and the failure of the Repeal Association, their breakaway became permanent.

The Great Famine, as we have seen, badly affected small farmers and farm labourers, and their families. Death and emigration decimated the Irish population. Those who survived, whether in Ireland, Britain or America, harboured feelings of anger and resentment against England. This antipathy caused the Young Irelanders to reconsider their aims and objectives, resulting in the organisation changing from peaceful to militant methods.

However, their attempted Rising in 1848 was badly prepared and proved unsuccessful. The leaders were captured and imprisoned. Participants such as John Mitchel, William Smyth O'Brien and Thomas Francis Meagher were charged under a new Treason Felony Act, found guilty and transported to Australia.

However, some Young Irelanders, including James Stephens and John O'Mahoney, escaped to France. In Paris they mixed with other revolutionaries and members of secret societies, where they learned the 'the art of war', especially revolution. France had by this time emerged from a successful revolution (1789-1799), which changed the balance of power in favour of the working class. The French revolution had been fuelled by many of the same inequalities, hardships, discrimination and lack of rights that Irish Catholics had endured for centuries.

The Fenians and The Irish Republican Brotherhood

'The Fenians' was the name given to an amalgamation of several individuals and organisations dedicated to the creation of an Irish democratic Republic, based on universal male suffrage. Two of the main organisations within the Fenian movement were the Irish Republican Brotherhood in Ireland, and Clan Na Gael in America. Both organisations were set up in 1858: the former in Paris by James Stephens, the latter by fellow Young Irelander, John O'Mahoney.

Membership of both organisations, which were oath-bound, secret societies, flourished in the 1850s and 1860s. In Ireland, 50,000 men had been recruited by 1865.[238] In America, many who had fled Ireland during the Famine joined Clan Na Gael. Thousands enlisted in the New York Militia and other regiments and fought in the American Civil War (1861-65).[239] Determined to learn skills and training that they could use in the future to liberate Ireland from British rule, they showed bravery and determination in battle, winning respect from both sides.

By 1868, the organisation had become a member of the International Association of Working Men, a revolutionary organisation founded by Karl Marx. Among its aims were the expropriation and communisation of land, as well as the abolition of inheritance rights

[238] https://www.theirishstory.com.

[239] The New York Militia, captained by Thomas Francis Meagher (another Young Irelander, who had escaped imprisonment in Van Diemen's Land for his part in the 1848 Rebellion) had been given permission to form an Irish Brigade within the Union Army.

– a system not unlike the ancient Irish one that existed under Brehon Law, which had been abolished and outlawed by Britain.

The Irish Republican Brotherhood's objective changed: it now sought a social, cultural and political revolution as well as a nationalist one. Its leaders recognised that a successful revolution must also incorporate a cultural one. One of them, John O'Leary (1830-1907), recruited William Butler Yeats, at that time a young poet, into the movement. O'Leary had taken part in the unsuccessful 1848 Rising. He managed to escape and went on to study and practise medicine in Paris. He returned to Ireland in 1863 and started to edit the organisation's newspaper, *The Irish People*. He was arrested in 1865, spent 7 years in prison and, on his release, returned as an exile to Paris, where he took part in the revolutionary activity of that city.

O'Leary's homes, in Paris and later in Ireland, became meeting places for artists, poets and writers. Taking Yeats under his patronage, he assisted him financially to publish such works as *Fairy and Folk Tales of The Irish Peasantry* in 1888 and *Representative Irish Tales* in 1891. O'Leary successfully encouraged Yeats to look to Irish themes, stories, metres and politics for his creative compositions, and to that end pointed him towards the works of such people as Eugene O'Curry, for translations from Irish manuscripts; Sir William Ferguson, who had rendered the Irish sagas into verse; and Standish O'Grady, who had rendered them into prose.

Yeats wrote many poems that showed his recognition of Ireland's colonial past and the near extinction of her druidic/mystical one. His poem, *The Curse of Cromwell*, with its veiled salutation to the Bardic poet Aodhagán Ó Rathaille (1670-1726); its mourning for the loss of Gaelic Ireland and all her literary and cultural traditions; its esoteric/druidic allusions; and its despair for contemporary Ireland under British rule, must surely rank as a masterpiece of Irish artistic and cultural resistance:

The Curse of Cromwell

You ask what I have found, as far and wide I go:
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's murderous crew,
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen, where are they?
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride –
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was crucified.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,
But there's no good complaining, for money's rant is on.
He that's mounting up must on his neighbour mount,
And we and all the Muses are things of no account.
They have schooling of their own, but I pass their schooling by,
What can they know that we know that know the time to die?
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

But there's another knowledge that my heart destroys,
As the fox in the old fable destroyed the Spartan boy's
Because it proves that things both can and cannot be;
That the swordsmen and the ladies can still keep company,
Can pay the poet for a verse and hear the fiddle sound,
That I am still their servant though all are underground.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

I came upon a great house in the middle of the night,
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,
And all my friends were there and made me welcome too;
But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled through;
And when I pay attention I must out and walk
Among the dogs and horses that understand my talk.
O what of that, O what of that,
What is there left to say?

Yeats is reminding us that the lineage of Gaelic poets goes back to a time before Christ. He is keeping the history of Gaelic culture fresh in the minds of a new generation, and drawing unfavourable comparisons with the one that replaced it, where poets and other artists are of no value in the money-loving and money-grabbing ethos that prevails.

The spiritual and cultural flame of Gaelic Ireland – which had been taken abroad for safekeeping by Franciscan monks during the Penal times, following Hugh O'Neill's flight to the Continent; which was carefully protected, secretly brought home and passed on to Charles O'Connor and his generation; which was kept alive by the United Irishmen and those men and women, such as Betsy Gray, who fought with them for true liberation and religious equality; which was brightly rekindled by the translation work of Charles O'Conor, Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan – was now being passed into the custodianship of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, under whose protection, as we shall see, it underpinned the Gaelic Revival, the Easter Rising and the establishment of the Irish Republic.

The Campaign for Home Rule

Another major campaign of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century was the campaign for Ireland to have its own parliament within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891), a Protestant landowner, modified Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Repeal of the Union by calling for Irish Home Rule. He became leader of the Home Rule League (from 1880 to 1882), and its successor, the Irish Parliamentary Party (from 1882 to 1891), which strongly campaigned for Home Rule.

In the General Election of 1885, the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) won 85 of the 103 Irish seats at Westminster. Although Britain's Liberal Prime Minister, William Gladstone, was committed to granting Home Rule, Parnell's Bill was defeated in the House of Commons in 1886. A second attempt, after Parnell's death, was introduced by Prime Minister Gladstone in 1893. It passed in the House of Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords. A third attempt, the Government of Ireland Act, was passed in 1914, but was suspended pending the First World War.

After the Easter Rising had taken place in 1916, and its leaders imprisoned or executed, a new political environment was taking shape in Ireland. Electoral support shifted dramatically from the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) to Sinn Féin. The IPP lost most of its seats in the 1918 General Election, while Sinn Féin, which won 73 out of 105 seats available to Ireland, stayed true to its manifesto, turned its back on the parliament in Westminster and set up an alternative, revolutionary Irish parliament, the first Dáil Éireann, which sat from 1919-1921. That Irish parliament declared Ireland an independent Republic, ratified the Irish Proclamation of 1916 and adopted a Provisional Constitution.

Obviously, this effectively put an end to the Home Rule movement. Other consequences of the dramatic events of those years will be set out below in due course, but suffice it to say for the moment that, as far as the Home Rule movement was concerned, it turned out to be not only another failure, but one with catastrophic consequences. A new Government of Ireland Act was passed in Westminster in 1920, creating two jurisdictions in Ireland, but implemented only in the newly created six counties of Northern Ireland. There, institutional privilege was guaranteed to the Protestant unionist majority. Instead of Home Rule for all of Ireland, Ireland was now divided into two different legal and political entities, a situation which remains to this day, more than one hundred years on.

The Land Wars

In 1879, another famine had occurred in the west of Ireland, forcing tenants once again into food and income poverty. Many landlords refused to accept reduced rents from their tenants, citing agrarian agitation and, once again, refused to contribute towards famine relief. The Land Wars in Ireland were a series of campaigns by the Irish National Land League (set up by Charles Stewart Parnell and Michael Davitt, along with other members of the Young Irelanders, including John Devoy) with the aim of setting fair rents, security of tenure and, ultimately, ownership of the land worked by small Irish farmers.

The first land war began in County Mayo in 1879. Faced with famine and poor harvests, tenants could not afford to pay their annual rents and were faced with eviction. Large meetings took place throughout Mayo under the direction of the National Land League. Tenants of each estate were encouraged to meet to set a fair rent to pay to their landlords; if those lower rents were refused, the money would be paid into the campaign fund. The plan targeted the most financially insecure landlords, who might face bankruptcy if they refused the lower rents.

Asked to give support to the campaign, the Vatican instead condemned the Land League's activities, such as boycotting. More legislation was introduced to punish those involved but, eventually, Catholic priests were drawn in as local leaders. The Land League campaign continued into the 1920s, using such methods as demonstrations, rent strikes, boycotts and parliamentary filibustering to achieve their aims.

In May 1880, Parnell was elected leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party. Its slogan 'The Land for the People' attracted support from small tenants on uneconomic land; from tenants looking for larger farms; and from those seeking nationalisation of the entire land mass of Ireland, arguing that the land had been taken from its rightful owners by English colonists, and that a foreign and unfair system of land ownership and usage had been imposed against the will of the Irish people.

In 1881, the government set up the Land Commission, which eventually allowed tenant farmers to buy out their own freeholds. But despite this legislation, tenants were still being evicted. Parnell and other Irish Parliamentary Party members, such as William O'Brien and John Dillon, over nine hundred people in all, most of whom were active in the Land League, were arrested and imprisoned under The Protection of Persons and Property Act,

1881, also known as the Irish Coercion Act, which allowed for internment without trial of those suspected of being involved in the Land Wars.

While in prison, the Land Leaguers called for a national rent strike to take place until they were released. In response, the government outlawed the Land League. However, in April 1882, under the Kilmainham Treaty, Parnell struck a deal with the government that he would guarantee an end to unlawful agrarian acts and would withdraw the demand for a national rent strike. All those who had been imprisoned were released, while more concessions were made to tenant farmers. Nevertheless, Michael Davitt and others did not agree with the new concessions and split from the organisation. Six months later, Parnell set up the Irish National League.

When the Land Commission was established in 1881, its role was to fix rents and redistribute farmland within Ireland. By 1920, the Commission had transferred 13.5 million acres and financed the purchase of freeholds to tenants, at a cost of over £20 million. However, the uneconomical size of many small holdings remained an issue. By 1925, it was estimated that 250,000 landowners held uneconomic farms, rendering them incapable of providing a decent livelihood. But by this time, most of Ireland was no longer under the control of the British and it was left to the new Free State government to deal with such outstanding matters.

The Aftermath of Nineteenth Century Agitation

It can be seen from the above that although many campaigns against British Rule took place in Ireland in the latter half of the nineteenth century, not many of them were successful. This was true especially of those who rejected violence to achieve their aims. However, they all fed into, and kept alive, a national frustration and antipathy against Britain. The spirit of resistance did not die, but by the end of the century people were adopting a new approach. It would no longer be one based on pacifism to the exclusion of militancy, nor on militancy to the exclusion of pacifism. It would be a militant uprising against England, incorporating a cultural revolution in Ireland.

The Gaelic Revival

We saw how John O'Leary of the Irish Republican Brotherhood nurtured the young poet William Butler Yeats, directing him towards sources and aspects of Gaelic culture which had been recovered by the translation work of John O'Donovan, Eugene O'Curry and others. It was now becoming very clear that, as well as having a long tradition of its own

language and laws, Ireland had also enjoyed a strong and vibrant culture of poetry, music, storytelling, song and dance, as well as one embracing visual arts, education and spirituality, all of which successive English monarchs and governments had contrived so deliberately to destroy.

Organisations promoting native Irish culture sprang up all over the country. In sport, the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) was founded in 1884, to promote native Irish sports, such as hurling, football and camogie. Led by former Fenians, the GAA banned the playing of English games such as soccer, rugby and cricket. The success of that organisation can still be seen today, with GAA facilities, teams and tournaments hugely popular in every county in Ireland and further afield, lately for girls as well as boys.

The world of Irish literature, drama and poetry was well served by the establishment of the Abbey Theatre by William Butler Yeats and Lady Gregory in 1904, the aim of which was to "bring upon the stage the deeper emotions of Ireland". Lady Gregory wrote, or translated, around 40 plays. One cast member of the Abbey Acting Company, Sean Connolly, was the first Irish casualty to be shot and killed as he fought in Dublin Castle during the Easter Rising.

Additionally, the almost lost tradition of the playing of Irish music was revived by such projects as the Granard and Belfast Harp Festivals of the late 1700s. Henry VIII's and Elizabeth I's determination to 'hang all the harpers and burn all their instruments' had seriously undermined this aspect of Irish musical culture to the extent of near extinction. Now, collectors of traditional Irish music, such as Edward Bunting, notated and preserved for posterity this threatened treasure of Ireland's musical wealth, so much so that today, Irish music, embracing many musical instruments, is thriving, not alone in Ireland but world-wide, thanks to the foresight of eighteenth and nineteenth century revivalists, and twentieth century teaching and performance organisations, such as *Comhaltas Ceolteori Éireann.*

One of the other great successes of the Gaelic Revival was the determination to restore the Irish language to the people of Ireland; a language which for centuries had been deliberately outlawed, and its speakers persecuted and marginalised, by the English. The Irish language and poetry, as we will see below, were vitally important expressions of the Gaelic Cultural Revival.

Not only men, but many women too, played an important part in both the cultural revival and the military campaign to free Ireland from English rule. As stated above, Lady Gregory, a patron of the arts, worked with WB Yeats to make the Abbey Theatre a huge success. Yeats also had a female muse, Maud Gonne, whose husband, John MacBride, was executed in the wake of the Easter Rising. She herself was a political activist, being a member of both the suffragette movement and *Cumann na mBan*.[240] Yeats also received patronage and friendship from the Gore-Booth family of Lissadell in County Sligo, whose daughters, his friends, were Eva[241] and Constance (later Countess Markievicz), who was a founder member of the youth organisation *Fianna Éireann,* as well as Cumann na mBan and the Irish Citizen Army. She fought in the Easter Rising and was sentenced to death, later commuted to life imprisonment. From Holloway Prison she was elected to the Westminster parliament in 1918 (the first woman ever), but instead joined other Irish politicians in forming the first Dáil Éireann in Dublin, where she became a government Minister.

The reawakening of the true knowledge of Ireland's forgotten history and culture inspired a new generation to combine those important discoveries with a modern physical force rebellion, in another determined attempt to oust England from Ireland. The Gaelic Revival was the most important manifestation of the cultural side of that new resistance movement. The Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Irish Volunteers, the Irish Citizen Army and Cumann na mBan were the physical force elements of it. The Easter Rising of 1916 was the culmination of those two forces; and Pádraig Pearse, the hero of this Chapter, was a highly influential figure in both camps.

Pádraig Pearse

Pádraig Pearse was born in Dublin, in 1880, into a middle-class family. He was privately educated between 1886 and 1891, followed by five years at the Christian Brothers school in Westland Row, Dublin. Leaving school at the age of sixteen, he joined the Gaelic League, and also attended the Royal University and King's Inns, from where he graduated

[240] Cumann na mBan, founded in 1914, was an Irish Republican women's paramilitary group which became a unit of the 'Army of the Irish Republic', whose members fought alongside the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army during the Easter Rising, as well as carrying out other tasks such as tending the injured, carrying guns and messages, and transporting food and other essential supplies.

[241] Eva Gore-Booth was a poet, theologian, suffragette, feminist and campaigner for women's rights. She was instrumental in having her sister's death sentence commuted to life imprisonment, but unsuccessful in her attempts to save the life of Sir Roger Casement, who was condemned to death by hanging for the importation of German arms and ammunition intended for the Easter Rising.

in 1901 with BA and BL degrees. Throughout his time at university he was employed as a tutor in Irish with the CBS school and lectured part-time in Irish at University College Dublin.

By 1908 he had established his own school for boys, St Enda's, in Ranelagh, Dublin and became its headmaster. Two years later he set up a school for girls, St Ita's, and also taught some lessons there. In 1912, he transferred St Enda's school to Rathfarnham, Dublin.

Padraig Pearse contributed to the Gaelic Revival in many ways, including by promoting the use of the Irish language; calling for reforms in education; and contributing to Irish literature, especially poetry.

The Gaelic League *(Conradh na Gaeilge),* which spearheaded the Gaelic Revival, was set up in 1893 by Eoin MacNeill[242] and Douglas Hyde[243]. The Irish language had been in sharp decline during the 1800s, most notably by being frowned upon by the Catholic Church, which regarded it as part of a pagan culture best eradicated. After the Great Famine in the mid-nineteenth century, English had become the language of the growing trade and industry sectors in the east of the country, with Irish delegated mainly to the western regions. The census of 1851 shows only 23% of the population claiming Irish as their first language at that time. The Irish language became politicised, with politicians calling for it to be banned from schools and accusing those who advocated its use of being guilty of hatred for England.

The Gaelic League set out to reverse this decline in the use of the language, and what they regarded as the anglicisation of the country, by encouraging its use in everyday life. The League organised local branches, held weekly talks on Irish culture, ran conversation classes and taught native Irish speakers how to read and write in Irish. It also published a newspaper, *An Claidheamh Soluis* (the Sword of Light), published new texts in Irish, standardised the variations in the language and campaigned for Irish to be taught in schools.

By 1903, the League had established 400 branches, including one in Belfast, which was non-sectarian and included Protestants. By 1905, the number of branches had grown to 900, with 100,000 members. Many of the branches were located overseas, in England,

[242] Eoin MacNeill (1867-1945), born in Glenarm, County Antrim, was one of the founders of the Gaelic League and of the Irish Volunteers. He became Professor of Early Irish History at University College Dublin and, after the Easter Rising, became an eminent scholar of Ireland's Brehon Laws.
[243] Douglas Hyde, a Protestant, was Ireland's first President from 1938–1945.

Scotland, Wales, the USA, South Africa and New Zealand. With increased membership came increased income, and the ability to pay full-time staff, who helped with administration and organising local activities, such as classes in conversation; reading and writing; lectures; exhibitions; *féiseanna*; excursions; *céilithe* and the annual *Oireachtas* festival.

In parallel with his own ongoing personal education and teaching activities, Pearse became involved with the Gaelic League in many ways. In 1898 he became a member of the *Coiste Gnótha* (Business Committee) and in 1900 became secretary of the Publications Committee. As editor of the League's newspaper, An Claidheamh Soluis, from 1903 to 1908, he wrote many hard-hitting, influential articles, including on his observations of bi-lingual teaching at schools that he visited in Wales and Belgium. He gave lectures at Gaelic League branches throughout the country, at University College Dublin and at the Gaelic League College in Leinster. He also gave practical help to Irish language teachers by providing them with lesson plans for their classes. And, having built a cottage in the Rosmuc *Gaeltacht*[244] of Connemara, he brought students there to experience Gaeltacht life at first-hand.

As Professor John Coolahan, Emeritus Professor of Education at Maynooth University states, *". . . as a Committee member, editor, investigator, pamphleteer, public speaker, lecturer and teacher, Pearse was untiring in his efforts both to bring about change in the character of Irish education and in promoting the language revival and cultural renewal movement . . . which he considered integral to a distinct Irish nationhood"*.[245]

Pearse's other passion was education. He advocated a child-centred approach to education, aimed at helping children to prepare for their future life. He rejected the strict English system of exam-orientated education in Ireland, which he compared to slavery, and accused it of being *"most grotesque and horrible of English inventions for the debasement of Ireland"*.[246]

He also criticised England's reasons for imposing this system in Ireland, likening it to that country's deliberately vicious and cruel crimes in other countries under its control. He wrote:

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[244] In such areas Irish was used and spoken as their first language, by all or most of the population.
[245] Professor J Coolahan, *Pádraig Pearse the Educationalist, Context and continuing relevance of Pearse's thought and practice for education in Ireland today*, Education Matters Yearbook (2016-2017), p. 18.
[246] PH Pearse, *The Murder Machine*, Corpus of Electronic Texts Edition, p. 8.

"A French writer has paid the English a very well-deserved compliment. He says that they never commit a useless crime. When they hire a man to assassinate an Irish patriot, when they blow a Sepoy[247] from the mouth of a cannon, when they produce a famine in one of their dependencies, they have always an ulterior motive. They do not do it for fun. Humorous as these crimes are, it is not the humour of them, but their utility, that appeals to the English. Unlike Gilbert's Mikado, they would see nothing humorous in boiling oil. If they retained boiling oil in their penal code, they would retain it as they retain flogging before execution in Egypt, strictly because it has been found useful".[248]

He continues,

"The education system here was designed by our masters in order to make us willing or at least manageable slaves . . . Ireland is not merely in servitude, but in a kind of penal servitude. Certain of the slaves among us are appointed jailors over the common herd of slaves. And they are trained from their youth for this degrading office. The ordinary slaves are trained for their lowly tasks in dingy places called schools; the buildings in which the higher slaves are trained are called colleges and universities".[249]

He further condemned the system as being:

"ruthless . . . without pity and without passion. It is cold and mechanical, like the ruthlessness of an immensely powerful engine . . . There are no ideas there, no love of beauty, no love of books, no love of knowledge, no heroic inspiration".[250]

And he exposes the real reason for the system's deliberate cruelty and duplicity in this way:

"The English thing that is called education in Ireland is founded on a denial of the Irish nation . . . To invent such a teaching and to persuade us that it is an education system, an Irish education system to be defended by Irishmen against attack, is the most wonderful thing that the English have accomplished in Ireland; and the most wicked".[251]

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[247] Sepoys were Indian soldiers in the service of the British in India. When deemed guilty of rebelling or deserting, they were executed by being blown from a cannon. It was not only a barbaric act but, given that the body parts were blown to smithereens and scattered over a wide area, the practice prevented ritual Hindu funeral rites taking place, thus punishing the victim, and his family, even after death.
[248] PH Pearse, *op. cit.,* p. 8.
[249] *Ibid.,* pp. 8-9.
[250] *Ibid.,* pp. 11-12.
[251] *Ibid.,* pp. 14-16.

Pearse's Educational Vision

In contrast, Pearse advocated, and set out to create, a system where art, literature, patriotism, religion and science, among other subjects, would be taught to children to *"affect their character and conduct"*.[252] And he looked to the education system of ancient Ireland as both a noble forerunner and a model for future aspiration:

"How often does the Irish vocable light up as with a lantern some immemorial Irish attitude, some whole phase of Irish thought! Thus the words which the old Irish employed when they spoke of education show how they had gripped the very heart of that problem. To the old Irish the teacher was aite*, 'fosterer', the pupil was* dalta*, 'foster child', the system was* aiteachas*, 'fosterage'; words which we still retain as* oide, dalta, oideachas*. And is it not the precise aim of education to 'foster'? Not to inform, to indoctrinate, to conduct through a course of studies (though these be the dictionary meanings of the word), but first and last to 'foster' the elements of character native to a soul, to help to bring these to their full perfection rather than to implant exotic excellences. Fosterage implies a foster-father or foster-mother – a person – as its centre and inspiration rather than a code of rules"*.[253]

Pearse put his theories into practice at the two schools he established and taught in, St Enda's and St Ita's. He encouraged Irish to be used in conversations among the pupils, aiming to make it the everyday language of the school. He used Irish language books and stories of ancient heroes, such as Cúchulainn, furnished the classrooms with Irish paintings and pleasant surroundings, and encouraged art and theatrics. Science and nature study were also deemed essential; and Gaelic games were taught and played competitively.

Pearse's brother, William, joined St Enda's as an art teacher and eventually took over the running of the school. His sister Mary taught music; his sister Margaret was an assistant mistress and his mother was the housekeeper. In this way he attempted to recreate, as far as possible, the ancient Irish system of fosterage and education.

The decision to move the school to a substantial property, set in its own grounds in Rathfarnham, was taken because Robert Emmet had often walked those same grounds, with his sweetheart Sarah Curran, and Pearse hoped the pupils would thereby connect with this aspect of Ireland's history. They were also encouraged to cultivate their own

[252] *Ibid.,* p. 14.
[253] *Ibid.,* p. 21.

patch of garden in the grounds, and observe nature at first hand, taking care not to kill any living creature.

While the school was an academic and cultural success, Pearse incurred substantial debt in its running. In 1914, he was forced to travel to America on a fund-raising tour, where he met John Devoy, a veteran of the Fenian Movement, and Joseph McGarrity, leader of Clan na Gael, who helped him to raise the necessary funding. Shortly before that, he had joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Irish Volunteers.[254]

It was a mark of Pearse's standing within the Gaelic Revival, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, that he was chosen, in 1915, to deliver the oration for the venerated revolutionary hero, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa. His speech was so well received that he was shortly afterwards elevated to the IRB's Supreme Council.

Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa

Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831-1915) was an Irish Fenian and member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Born in Rosscarbery in west Cork, the son of a shopkeeper, his father was a descendant of the Clan Aneslis O'Donovans, Gaelic Chieftains of the area, who had entered into the 'Surrender and Regrant' scheme in earlier centuries.[255] After the failure of the Battle of Kinsale, the family's fortunes, like that of so many others, had failed badly.

O'Donovan Rossa was a young boy when he experienced the horrors of the Great Famine, an event which caused him to suffer from famine fever, which claimed his father's life and which forced his family into debt and eviction. Members of the family ended up going their different ways, with Rossa's mother emigrating to America.

The Famine had a profound effect on the young O'Donovan Rossa for the rest of his life. In a poem composed in solitary confinement in prison, some twenty years later, he recalls painful Famine memories, *"that nursed my hate of tyranny and wrong/that helmed my manhood in the path of truth/and help me now to suffer and be strong".*[256]

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[254] See below.

[255] John O'Donovan personally researched this lineage for O'Donovan Rossa. A copy of the Letters Patent, purporting to grant rights to the Chieftain of the clan under English Common Law, in the seventeenth century, are still available to see. The 'Rossa' part of his name comes from the townland of Rossmore in Kilmeen, County Cork.

[256] An excerpt from his poem *'Jillen Andy'* - see below.

In his early political life, in 1856, Rossa founded the Phoenix National and Literary Society, which merged with the newly formed Irish Republican Brotherhood in 1858. James Stephens, visiting Skibbereen in that year, initiated Rossa into the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Soon afterwards, from 1858-1859, he was imprisoned for political activity, and again in 1865, on charges of treason felony, held in various English prisons, and served five years in deplorable conditions. He incurred especially harsh punishments, including solitary confinement and denial of visits and correspondence, for his continued defiance and refusal to obey prison rules.

While there, he composed a harrowing poem (in his head, for he had no pen nor paper) about the funeral of Jillen Andy, a neighbour woman in Rosscarbery, who had died during the Famine twenty years earlier.[257] Like the Bardic poets of old, he composed and memorised each verse over a day and night before composing the next verse, twenty-two in all.

The poem recounts his personal experience of helping to bury Jillen Andy and how the experience grounded his future political views and actions. Its tenderness, simplicity and pathos contrasts not only with the more detached account of the Famine suffering given by the Revd Balch at the start of this Chapter, but possibly also challenges some assumptions about the mindset of a committed revolutionary activist. The poem demonstrates the caring humanity of one who physically resisted and acted against England's rule in Ireland.

Jillen Andy

"Come to the graveyard if you're not afraid,
I'm going to dig my mother's grave, she's dead,
And I want someone that will bring the spade,
For Andy's out of home and Charlie's sick in bed."

Thade Andy was a simple spoken fool.
With whom in early days I longed to stroll;
He'd often take me on his back to school,
And make the master laugh himself, he was so droll.

[257] Rossa rejected outright the 'unfortunate natural disaster' explanation of the Famine, but rather laid the blame full square at the door of the British government.

In songs and ballads he took great delight,
And prophecies of Ireland yet being freed,
And, singing them by our fireside at night
I learned songs from Thade before I learned to read.

And I have still by heart his 'Colleen Fhune',
His 'Croppy Boy', his 'Phoenix of the Hall',
And I could 'rise' his 'Rising of the Moon',
If I could sing in prison cell, or sing at all!

He'd walk the eeriest place a moonlight night,
He'd whistle in the dark, even in bed;
In fairy fort or graveyard Thade was quite
As fearless of a ghost as any ghost of Thade.

Now in the dark churchyard we work away,
The shovel in his hand, in mine the spade.
And seeing Thade cry, I cried myself that day,
For Thade was fond of me and I was fond of Thade.

But after twenty years, why not will such
A bubbling spring up to my eyelids start?
Ah! There be things that ask no leave to touch
The fountains of the eyes or feelings of the heart.

"This load of clay will break her bones I fear,
For when alive she wasn't over-strong;
We'll dig no deeper, I can watch her here,
A month or so, sure none will do me wrong."

Four men bear Jillen on a door – 'tis light,
They have not much of Jillen but her frame;
No mourners come, as 'tis believed the sight,
Of death or sickness now begets the same.

And those brave hearts that volunteer to touch
Plague-stricken Death, are tender as they're brave,
They raise poor Jillen from her tainted couch,
And shade their swimming eyes while laying her in the grave.

I stand within that grave, not wide nor deep,
The slender, wasted body at my feet;
What wonder is it if strong men will weep,
O'er famine stricken Jillen in her winding sheet!

Her head I try to pillow on a stone.
But it will hang one side, as if the breath
Of famine gaunt into the corpse had blown
And blighted in the nerves the rigid strength of Death.

"Hand me that stone, child!" In his hands 'tis placed,
Down-channelling his cheeks are tears like rain;
The stone within his handkerchief is cased,
And then I pillow on it Jillen's head again.

"Untie that nightcap string; unloose that lace;
Take out that pin. There now, she's nicely rise,
But lay the apron first across her face,
So the earth won't touch her lips or blind her eyes."

"Don't grasp the shovel too tightly - there, make a heap,
Stale down each shovelful quietly; there, let it creep
Over her body lightly; friend do not weep,
Tears would disturb poor Jillen in her last long sleep."

And Thade was faithful to his watch and ward,
Where'er he'd spend the day, at night he'd haste
With his few sods of turf to that churchyard,
Where he laid himself before the month was past.

Then, Andy died a-soldiering in Bombay,
And Charlie died in Ross the other day;
Now, no one lives to blush because I say
That Jillen Andy went un-coffined to the clay.

E'en all are dead that buried Jillen, save
One banished man who dead-alive remains,
The little boy that stood within the grave,
Stands for his Country's cause in England's prison chains.

How oft in dreams that burial scene appears,
Through death, eviction, prison, exile, home,
Through all the suns and moons of twenty years,
And oh! how short these years compared with years to come.

Some things are strongly on the mind impressed,
And others faintly imaged there it seems;
And this is why when reason sinks to rest,
Phases of life do show and shadow forth in dreams.

And this is why in dreams I see the face,
Of Jillen Andy looking in my own,
The poet-hearted man, the pillow-case,
The spotted handkerchief that softened the hard stone.

Welcome these memories of scenes of youth,
That nursed my hate of tyranny and wrong.
That helmed my manhood in the path of truth,
And help me now to suffer and be strong.[258]

While he was still in prison, in 1869, Rossa won the Tipperary by-election; but his election was declared invalid on account of him being an imprisoned felon. The following year, as part of an amnesty given to Fenian prisoners, he was released on condition he left Ireland. He travelled to New York, where he continued his republican activities, joining Clan na Gael, founding *The United Irishman* newspaper and raising money for the Irish republican cause. He also recruited many young Irishmen into Clan na Gael. He came back to Ireland in 1894 on a speaking tour, but later returned to New York, where he died in June 1915.

While in Ireland, Rossa was responsible for swearing-in (or 'baptising' as he called it) many young men into the Fenian movement. He had read the works of John O'Donovan and Eugene O'Curry and had corresponded with both men. He also initiated four of their sons (brothers and cousins) into the Irish Republican Brotherhood.

It is an indication of how well regarded by the Irish population O'Donovan Rossa was, that when his remains were repatriated for burial in Ireland, his coffin lay in state at City Hall, Dublin for several days, viewed by thousands who had travelled from America,

[258] Reprinted in *corkgen.org/corkancestors/Fenians.htm.*

England and all parts of Ireland. Requiem Mass was said in the Pro-Cathedral; hundreds of thousands lined the route to Glasnevin cemetery and 20,000 people took part in the funeral procession, which is said to have taken several hours to pass each point on the route.

His oration, delivered at his graveside, was given by Pádraig Pearse, followed by a volley of shots, the sounding of *The Last Post* and the laying of wreaths on the grave. His mortal remains lay alongside those of fellow Fenians, John O'Leary and James Stephens.

Oration for Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, delivered by Pádraig Pearse[259]

"It has seemed right, before we turn away from this place in which we have laid the remains of O'Donovan Rossa, that one among us should, in the name of all, speak the praise of that valiant man, and endeavour to formulate the thought and the hope that are in us as we stand around his grave. And if there is anything that makes it fitting that I, rather than some other, rather than some of the grey-haired men who were young with him and shared in his labour and in his suffering, should speak here, it is perhaps that I may be taken of speaking on behalf of a new generation that has been re-baptised in the Fenian faith, and that has accepted the responsibility of carrying out the Fenian programme. I propose to you then that, here by the grave of this unrepentant Fenian, we renew our 'baptismal vows'; that, here by the grave of this unconquered and unconquerable man, we ask of God, each one for himself, such unshakeable purpose, such high and gallant courage, such unbreakable strength of soul as belonged to O'Donovan Rossa.

"Deliberately here we avow ourselves, as he avowed himself in the dock, Irishmen of one allegiance only. We of the Irish Volunteers, and you others who are associated with us in today's task and duty, are bound together and must stand together henceforth in brotherly union for the achievement of the freedom of Ireland. And we know only one definition of freedom: it is Tone's definition, it is Mitchel's definition, it is Rossa's definition. Let no man blaspheme the cause that the dead generations of Ireland served by giving it any other name and definition than their name and their definition.

"We stand at Rossa's grave not in sadness but rather in exaltation of spirit that it has been given to us to come thus into so close a communion with that brave and splendid Gael. Splendid and holy causes are served by men who are themselves splendid and holy. O'Donovan Rossa was splendid in the proud manhood of him, splendid in the heroic grace of him, splendid in the Gaelic strength and clarity and truth of him. And all that splendour and pride and strength was compatible with a

[259] Reprinted at Oration of Patrick Pearse (www.easter1916.net).

humility and a simplicity of devotion to Ireland, to all that was olden and beautiful and Gaelic in Ireland, the holiness and simplicity of patriotism of a Michael Cleary or of an Eoghan O'Growney. The clear true eyes of this man almost alone in his day visioned Ireland as we of today would surely have her: not free merely, but Gaelic as well; not Gaelic merely, but free as well.

"In a closer spiritual communion with him now than ever before or perhaps ever again, in a spiritual communion with those of his day, living and dead, who suffered with him in English prisons, in communion of spirit too with our own dear comrades who suffer in English prisons today, and speaking on their behalf as well as our own, we pledge to Ireland our love, and we pledge to English rule in Ireland our hate.

"This is a place of peace, sacred to the dead, where men should speak with all charity and with all restraint; but I hold it a Christian thing, as O'Donovan Rossa held it, to hate evil, to hate untruth, to hate oppression, and, hating them, to strive to overthrow them. Our foes are strong and wise and wary; but, strong and wise and wary as they are, they cannot undo the miracles of God who ripens in the hearts of young men the seeds sown by the young men of a former generation. And the seeds sown by the young men of '65 and '67 are coming to their miraculous ripening today.

"Rulers and Defenders of Realms had need to be wary if they would guard against such processes. Life springs from death; and from the graves of patriot men and women spring living nations. The Defenders of this Realm have worked well in secret and in the open. They think that they have pacified Ireland. They think that they have purchased half of us and intimidated the other half. They think that they have foreseen everything, think that they have provided against everything; but the fools, the fools, the fools! – they have left us our Fenian dead, and while Ireland holds these graves, Ireland unfree shall never be at peace."

Pádraig Pearse's Literature

As well as writing several works of prose and plays, Pearse was an outstanding poet. His poetry was both Christian and mystical, in the tradition of Ireland's ancient beliefs, and often contained references to self-sacrifice and redemption. The selection below gives a taste of the wide range of emotions within his poems, each emotion often diametrically opposite to another: the gentleness and the fierce determination; the anger and the love of all things delicate and vulnerable; the sense of shame for the endurances of his people and the determination to rid the English from Ireland in the coming conflict, which he foretold. He speaks with authority, as a leader, as a visionary, both to tell his people that their hardship is coming to an end, and to warn England that the time for reckoning has come.

In *The Mother*, which Pearse wrote after the Rising, in his prison cell, knowing that he was to be executed, he is foretelling the effect, on his own mother, of his and his brother's impending deaths. But he is also describing how many Irish mothers have dealt with, and will deal with, their sorrow and pride at losing sons in the resistance wars against England.

The Mother

I do not grudge them; Lord, I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing.
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed;
But I will speak their names to my own heart
In the long nights;
The little names that were familiar once
Round my dead hearth.
Lord, thou art hard on mothers:
We suffer in their coming and their going;
And tho' I grudge them not, I weary, weary
Of the long sorrow – and yet I have my joy:
My sons were faithful, and they fought.

In the following poem, *The Rebel*, Pearse lays bare his own reasons for getting involved in the war against England/Britain, sets out his Gaelic credentials and asserts himself as a leader, chosen by God, of his downtrodden people. He ends with a warning, a prophecy, to England/Britain that its time is up.

The Rebel

I am come of the seed of the people, the people that sorrow,
That have no treasure but hope,
No riches laid up but a memory
Of an ancient glory.
My mother bore me in bondage, in bondage my mother was born,
I am of the blood of serfs;
The children with whom I have played, the men and women with whom I have eaten,

Have had masters over them, have been under the lash of masters,
And though gentle, have served churls;
The hands that have touched mine, the dear hands whose touch is familiar to me,
Have worn shameful manacles, have been bitten at the wrist by manacles,
Have grown hard with the manacles and the task-work of strangers,
I am flesh of the flesh of these lowly, I am bone of their bone,
I that have never submitted;
I that have a soul greater than the souls of my people's masters,
I that have vision and prophecy and the gift of fiery speech,
I that have spoken with God on the top of His holy hill.

And because I am of the people, I understand the people,
I am sorrowful with their sorrow, I am hungry with their desire:
My heart has been heavy with the grief of mothers,
My eyes have been wet with the tears of children,
I have yearned with old wistful men,
And laughed or cursed with young men;
Their shame is my shame, and I have reddened for it,
Reddened for that they have served, they who should be free,
Reddened for that they have gone in want, while others have been full,
Reddened for that they have walked in fear of lawyers and of their jailors
With their writs of summons and their handcuffs,
Mean men and cruel!
I could have worn stripes on my body rather than this shame of my people.

And now I speak, being full of vision;
I speak to my people, and I speak in my people's name to the masters of my people.
I say to my people that they are holy, that they are august, despite their chains,
That they are greater than those who hold them, and stronger and purer,
That they have but need of courage, and to call on the name of their God,
God the unforgetting, the dear God that loves the peoples
For whom He died naked, suffering shame.

And I say to my people's masters: Beware,
Beware of the thing that is coming, beware the risen people,
Who shall take what ye would not give.
Did ye think to conquer the people,
Or that Law is stronger than life and than men's desire to be free?
We will try it out with you, ye that have harried and held,
Ye that have bullied and bribed, tyrants, hypocrites, liars!

In the next poem, *The Wayfarer*, Pearse shows his tender side, recalling the glory of nature in small things, aware that – for him – they will soon be no more. He is demonstrating his knowledge of, and belief in, Ireland's Olden Ways. He acknowledges one of its truths – the reality of polarities in this world: of life and death; of joy and sorrow; of good and evil. One cannot exist without its opposite. And he knows change is coming, his heart has told him so; he can foresee the future. He has seen in his mind's eye that the mission he planned and embarked on, the Easter Rising, is going to reap positive changes in Ireland, but also ones that will bring great sorrow, suffering and death - as they most assuredly did during the War of Independence, the Civil War and the Troubles in the North. No wonder he ends the poem by saying he feels sorrowful: he feels the weight of Ireland's past and future on his shoulders. This was his last poem, written in Kilmainham Gaol on the night before his execution.

The Wayfarer

The beauty of the world hath made me sad,
This beauty that will pass;
Sometimes my heart hath shaken with great joy
To see a leaping squirrel in a tree,
Or a red lady-bird upon a stalk,
Or little rabbits in a field at evening,
Lit by a slanting sun;
Or some green hill where shadows drifted by
Some quiet hill where mountainy man hath sown
And would soon reap; near to the gate of Heaven;

Or children with bare feet upon the sands
Of some ebbed sea, or playing on the streets
Of little towns in Connacht,
Things young and happy.
And then my heart hath told me:
These will pass,
Will pass and change, will die and be no more,
Things bright and green, things young and happy;
And I have gone upon my way,
Sorrowful.

Many of the other leaders of the Easter Rising of 1916, as well as Pearse, had been steeped in the Gaelic Revival. All of the signatories of the Proclamation were on the Military Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and had accepted that a political revolution could only succeed if it went hand in hand with a cultural one. The ancient history and cultural heritage of Ireland, now accessible to them thanks to the work of the translators Charles O'Conor in the eighteenth century, Eugene O'Curry and John O'Donovan in the nineteenth century, along with Fr Patrick Dineen[260] in the twentieth century, showed them the beliefs that their pre-Christian ancestors had held concerning Gaelic philosophy, the meaning of life and death, the importance of working in harmony with nature and, crucially, the importance of seeking personal spiritual insights and advancement. It is there to be seen in Pearse's poetry that he had received, and internalised, such knowledge.

It can also be seen in the poetry of many of the other leaders who, like Pearse, had been given insights into druidic philosophy and ancient Irish history. These include Joseph Plunkett (who wrote *I see His Blood Upon the Rose* and *A Wave of the Sea*); and Thomas Mac Donagh (who wrote *On A Poet Patriot* and *Barbara, born on 25 March 1915*). It is highly probable that Countess Markievicz and her sister Constance Gore-Booth, lifetime friends of WB Yeats, had also received and embraced that ancient Gaelic philosophy. When Countess Markievicz had been arrested and imprisoned in England for her part in the

[260] See below.

Rising, her sister wrote a poem for her birthday which, without doubt, demonstrates (for those with eyes to see) that both were initiates.[261]

As to how, and from whom, leading members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood gained their insights into such matters, we can take an educated guess that Father Patrick Dinneen (1860-1934) from Shrone, Rathmore, County Kerry, was, at the very least, in some way responsible.

Father Patrick Dinneen

Fr Dinneen had been ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1894. However, he had resigned from his ministry in 1900, by mutual agreement with the Catholic Church authorities, in order to pursue another course in life. That course led him to research, translate and publish material for the Irish Texts Society and Conradh na Gaeilge. Such works explained the hidden meanings within many poems written by Bardic poets, including those from his own home area of Sliabh Luachra with which he was well acquainted, such as those of Aodhagán Ó Rathaille (1670-1726). Dineen also published translations of Gaelic folklore and prose, wrote a novel and a play and composed many other original works in Irish. Additionally, he made available the complete Irish language edition of Geoffrey Keating's History of Ireland, *Foras Feasa Ar Éirinn*, first published in 1634, to many who had previously been unable to access it. His other outstanding contribution to Irish learning was the publication (in two editions) of his Irish-English Dictionary (*Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*), still hailed today as unrivalled in its wide-ranging scope and meticulous depth of information.

In the years leading up to the Easter Rising, Dinneen became a member of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, joining other Dublin-based, intellectual Kerry 'exiles' there. As with many other Gaelic Revival cultural organisations, this branch had been infiltrated by members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. According to one commentator,[262] Dineen had no interest in politics or the Easter Rising but, even if true, that is not to say that his work did not interest and influence those who did. Besides, in some of the entries in his Dictionary he shows his familiarity with, and understanding of, ancient Gaelic philosophy as practised by the Druids and poets suppressed by the English. Likewise, his translations of the Bardic poets of Sliabh Luachra and other places, which had been

[261] E Gore-Booth, *To C.M. on Her Prison Birthday, February, 1917.*

[262] N O'Connell, *Father Dinneen – His Dictionary and the Gaelic Revival,* Irish Texts Society, *https://irishtextssociety.org/oconnell.htm.*

composed in the dying years of Gaelic society, demonstrate his deep interest in their work and his desire to spread the knowledge of the esoteric and philosophical content of their poetry. Like Charles O'Connor, Turlough Ó Carolan and Eugene O'Curry before him, it seems highly likely that Dinneen was another link in an unbroken chain of spiritual insight and assistance, set in place by the descendants of Hugh O'Neill's 'government in exile', to protect the flame of Gaelic philosophy and culture from destruction and extinction.

The First World War (1914-1918)

The First World War was a harbinger of dramatic changes in the political and constitutional life of Ireland. The long-awaited Home Rule Act of 1914 passed in both Houses of the British Parliament and was given royal assent. However, its implementation was suspended during the War. It had been vehemently opposed by the unionists in Ulster, 450,000 of whom, men and women, had signed the Ulster Covenant in 1912, which professed *"by all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland"*. Early in 1914 they set up an armed militia, the Ulster Volunteers, determined, by force of arms if necessary, to have the Act repealed, or ensure that Ulster be excluded from its provision for Home Rule.

In response, nationalists, including members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, formed the Irish Volunteers, determined to protect Irish people's right to the return of an Irish parliament, which had long been campaigned for and had now been promised. John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, demanded representation for his party within the governing body of the Irish Volunteers, a demand that was acceded to, resulting in the membership rising from 70,000 to 160,000.

When the First World War started, both nationalist and unionist leaders (John Redmond, and Edward Carson, leader of the Ulster Unionist Alliance) supported the British side. Unlike the situation in Britain, where conscription was introduced in January 1916, there was no conscription in Ireland. Despite this, around 200,000 Irishmen from both sides of the political divide, voluntarily signed up to serve on Britain's behalf.

John Redmond called on Irishmen to enlist in the Irish regiments of the British Army. But not everyone agreed with Redmond. Those Irish Volunteer members who did, a large majority, split from the organisation and formed the National Volunteers, with many of them going on to sign up in those Irish regiments. Additionally, from around Ireland, among those who were in neither the Ulster Volunteers, the National Volunteers nor the

Irish Volunteers, approximately 100,000 Irishmen volunteered to fight for Britain. The remaining group within the Irish Volunteers, numbering 10,000, who demanded an Irish Republic rather than Home Rule, chose to stay with their commander-in-chief, Eoin MacNeill.

Despite this overwhelming support for Britain's cause from the Irish population, some Irish Volunteers, most noticeably those who were also in the Irish Republican Brotherhood, began to seize the opportunity to prepare for their own war against Britain. Another independent grouping of a few hundred members, the socialist Irish Citizen Army, led by James Connolly, made the same decision, as did the female members of Cumann na mBan. The era of constitutional nationalism was coming to an end in Ireland; the era of revolutionary nationalism was about to begin.

Within the Irish Volunteers, Pádraig Pearse formed a small, top secret Military Council. Aware that in October 1915, the Irish Citizen Army had been carrying out sham military acts against the British army in Dublin, and fearing that such activity could interfere with, and disrupt, their own intentions, the Military Council members decided to include James Connolly in their plans for a nationwide rising against British forces in Ireland. They abducted him, held him for a few days to explain their arguments until such time as he came to agree with them, and then swore him into membership of the Irish Republican Brotherhood and the Military Council of the Irish Volunteers. Connolly's Irish Citizen Army would now join forces with the Irish Volunteers and Cumann na mBan, for the impending Easter Sunday Rising, under the leadership of Pádraig Pearse.

The Military Council issued orders for the call up of all Irish Volunteer members for Easter Sunday, ostensibly for routine manoeuvres lasting three days, but that was a cover for a national insurrection. When Eoin MacNeill, previously unaware of these plans, discovered them on the Thursday before Easter, he demanded an explanation. He opposed Pearce, arguing that the Volunteers were not well enough armed to engage in an insurrection against the British at that time. Pearse assured him that arms – including 20,000 rifles, one million rounds of ammunition and explosives – were on their way from Germany, being brought into Ireland by Sir Roger Casement aboard the Aud ship. As a Rising during the War in Europe, with Germany's help, had long been an objective of the Irish Volunteers, MacNeill conceded. But the Aud was later intercepted by the British in the seas off the coast of Fenit, County Kerry, the arms and ship were scuppered and Casement was arrested. He was subsequently tried for treason, found guilty and hanged.

On Easter Saturday, when MacNeill became aware of the Aud's fate, he immediately countermanded Pearse's order for manoeuvres on Easter Sunday. Nevertheless, Pearse and his fellow Military Council members were determined to go ahead. As a result, the Easter Rising took place in Dublin only, on Easter Monday, April 24, 1916, with a severely diminished force.

The 1,200 members of the Irish Volunteers, the 120 members of the Irish Citizen Army and the 200 members of Cumann na mBan elected Pearse as President of the Irish Republic and Commander-in-Chief of their new 'Army of the Irish Republic'. They seized control of strategic buildings in the centre of Dublin, including the General Post Office on Dublin's main thoroughfare, Sackville Street,[263] on the steps of which they declared that Ireland was now a Republic, and hoisted republican flags. At the same time, a written Proclamation, was pasted on billboards around Dublin city centre. The Proclamation set out the reasons for the Rising, including the centuries-long refusal by Britain to restore to Ireland her independence. It also included promises for a new Ireland, with the ownership of the land in the hands of the people; with religious and civil rights granted to all citizens; with the granting of universal suffrage and the promise to cherish all of the children of the nation equally. It was signed by all seven members of the IRB Military Council: Thomas J Clarke, Seán Mac Diarmada, Thomas Mac Donagh, PH Pearse, Éamonn Ceannt, James Connolly and Joseph Plunkett.

If *Amergin's Song*[264] announced the beginning of a new Milesian era in Ireland, the Proclamation announced, in a similar way, another new departure for Ireland, a republican era, free of British control.

The buildings and sites in Dublin immediately occupied by 'the Rebels', as they came to be known, included: the Magazine Fort in the Phoenix Park; the General Post Office; Boland's Bakery; Dublin City Hall; Jacob's Biscuit Factory; the Mendicity Institution; St Stephen's Green; Mount Street Bridge and Northumberland Road; the Royal College of Surgeons; the South Dublin Union (now St James' Hospital); the Four Courts and surrounding streets; North King Street and Moore Street. However, crucially, the Rebels failed to capture Dublin's two main railway stations; and the two ports, Dublin Port and Kingstown (now Dún Laoghaire), also remained open, so allowing British troops to enter

[263] Now named O'Connell Street.
[264] See Chapter 1.

the country easily from England, and travel to Dublin by train from barracks at The Curragh and Belfast.

The Rebels held out for six days against a sustained attack from British troops, thousands of whom had been speedily sent from Britain, along with artillery and a gunboat. Eventually all the positions held by the insurgents fell to Britain's superior military force. Pearse unconditionally surrendered on Saturday 29 April, with a document stating,

"In order to prevent the slaughter of Dublin citizens, and in the hope of saving the lives of our followers now surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered, the members of the Provisional Government present at headquarters have agreed to an unconditional surrender, and the commandants of the various districts in the City and County will order their commands to lay down arms".[265]

As a result of the Rising, almost five hundred people lost their lives, 82 of whom were insurgents (including 16 who were later executed). In addition, 126 British soldiers and 17 members of the police force died. Nearly half of all people killed were civilians. The injured numbered 2,500. Three thousand, five hundred people were arrested. Many parts of Dublin lay in ruins from shelling and artillery bombardment by British troops.

When the fighting ended, the British retaliation was speedy and brutal. The country had been put under martial law during the Rising and remained that way. The insurgents were arrested and sent to Kilmainham Gaol to await their fate. Military Courts (Courts-martial) were quickly assembled to demonstrate some semblance of justice being administered; but there was no legal representation allowed, no innocent pleas allowed and no evidence on behalf of the prisoners allowed. Some British combatants even became 'judge, jury and executioner', an unlawful conflict of interest prohibited by Britain's own rules of war. The outcome for 90 of the prisoners was a verdict of guilty as charged, with a sentence of immediate execution handed down. Sixteen executions were carried out before the British realised that not alone Irish public opinion, but international opinion too, had turned against them.

Four days after his issuing of the surrender, on May 3, Pádraig Pearse walked from his prison cell, whistling, to the execution site within the prison grounds at Kilmainham. Thomas Clarke and Thomas Mac Donagh were also executed on that day. Mac Donagh offered members of the firing party cigarettes, and told them he did not hold their actions

[265] *See: Surrender Note (museum.ie.)*

against them, they were only doing their duty. He also offered the officer in charge his silver cigarette case, saying he would not need it anymore. Even the British agreed that the condemned men died bravely.

On the following day, May 4, Joseph Plunkett, Michael O'Hanrahan, Edward Daly and William Pearse were executed. On May 5, Major John McBride met his death. On May 8, it was the turn of Eamonn Ceannt, Con Colbert, Sean Hueston and Michael Mallin. On May 9, Thomas Kent was killed. On May 12, Sean MacDiarmada and James Connolly (who had been injured in the fighting and could not walk or stand, so was seated, tied to a chair) faced the firing squad.

The executions provoked widespread anger among the population of Dublin. Where before the people were hostile to the Rebels and their cause, and supportive of Britain,[266] now they turned against the British for being indiscriminate, unjust and excessively cruel.

People who had not even been involved in the Rising were sentenced to death. James Connolly's death, while being strapped to a chair, was considered vicious. Likewise, Joseph Plunkett was gravely ill when he left his hospital bed to join the Rising, and his execution was condemned by the people, especially when it became known that he had married his sweetheart, Grace Gifford, while being held in Kilmainham, shortly before he was shot.

Despite British promises that only the ringleaders, and those who had committed 'cold-blooded murder' would be executed, some who faced the firing squad were not ringleaders and had not killed anyone. It was felt William Pearse had been shot simply because he was Pádraig Pearse's brother. Francis Sheehy Skeffington had been arrested and shot during the Rebellion, even though he was a pacifist and had not taken part in it.

When it was taking place, the British government had played down the significance of the Rising to an international audience, but their retaliation afterwards showed just how seriously they viewed it. In the House of Commons, John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, warned the government to stop the executions, as to continue with them would make future constitutional politics in Ireland impossible. Unionist Party leader Edward Carson was of a similar view. John Dillon, deputy leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party urged the government to call a halt to the executions, saying, *"It is not*

[266] Many Irishmen had signed up for the British Army because it provided their wives and families with a much-needed income. See Chapter 7 for details of the Dublin Lockout.

murderers who are being executed; it is insurgents who have fought a clean fight, a brave fight . . ." He also said, *"In the whole of modern history . . . there has been no rebellion or insurrection put down with so much blood and so much savagery as the recent insurrection in Ireland".*[267]

The British government had no alternative but to give way to public and international pressure and stop the executions. Instead, they sent prisoners to prisoner-of-war camps, such as the one at Frongoch in Merionethshire, Wales, where, according to one prisoner held there, Michael Collins, preparations began in earnest among the detainees for the next phase of the struggle.

The Easter Rising may have been a military failure, but, as prophesised by Pádraig Pearse, the leaders became martyrs and their sacrifice was likened to Christ's on Good Friday. Finally, after hundreds of years of struggling to achieve it, the stage was now set for the successful liberation of Ireland. But things did not go entirely smoothly, as we will see in the final Chapters.

[267] The 1916 Rising (www.gov.ie).

Chapter Seven

Michael Collins (1890-1922)

THE EASTER RISING, while on first appearances a military failure, set in train a sequence of events that led to a partitioned Ireland becoming a Dominion of the British Commonwealth until, in 1949, it became a free, democratic Republic, with all political and economic ties with Britain severed. However, that freedom came at a great cost and applied solely to the political system of 26 of Ireland's 32 counties. The six counties of Northern Ireland remained a devolved and constituent part of the United Kingdom for many more years to come, as indeed remains the case at the time of writing.

This Chapter will outline how and why Ireland was partitioned after 1920 and will describe the tortuous path to semi-independence for those in the south of the country, who were forced to fight a War of Independence against Britain, and a Civil War against each other (at Britain's covert insistence), before a much diluted, pro-British, and culturally repressive form of normality and self-rule, the Irish Free State, was allowed to prevail.

The Aftermath of the Easter Rising

In 1914, the British parliament passed the Government of Ireland Act, 1914 (the third Home Rule Bill), intended to provide self-government for the whole of Ireland within the United Kingdom. It provided for a bicameral parliament in Dublin (with 164 Members of Parliament and 40 Senators). It also legislated for the election of 42 Irish Members of Parliament to sit in Westminster. The British administration in Dublin Castle would be abolished, with Britain being officially represented in Ireland by a Lord Lieutenant. Britain undertook to retain Ireland's spending capacity by a 'transferred sum' mechanism from British funds. Although the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords three times, the provisions of the Parliament Act of 1911, which curtailed the right of the House of Lords

to block legislation passed in the Commons for more than two parliamentary sessions, meant that it was eventually passed, and given royal assent, in 1914.

However, the Act was opposed by unionists in the North who strongly resisted the idea of being ruled from Dublin. They pledged to do everything in their power to see that it was never implemented. In the period that followed, as we saw in the previous chapter, they formed the Ulster Volunteers and began to arm themselves. They also mooted the idea that some of the counties in Ulster should be exempt from the provisions of the Act. As things turned out, the Act was suspended pending the First World War and was repealed before it was ever implemented. In its place, after the War had ended, a fourth Home Rule Bill was passed, which became known as the Government of Ireland Act 1920.

The Government of Ireland Act 1920

This Act, which came into force in May 1921, partitioned Ireland into two separate political entities: Southern Ireland (consisting of 26 counties), and Northern Ireland (consisting of the six counties of Fermanagh, Tyrone, Derry, Armagh, Antrim and Down), with both parts becoming self-governing, while remaining within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. This was an outcome that was welcomed by the unionist population in the North. There, when elections to the new parliament took place in May 1921, more than 75% of the seats were won by the Ulster Unionist Party. The voting resulted in: Ulster Unionists 40 seats, Sinn Féin 6 seats, Nationalist 6 seats.

Elections in the south of Ireland took place on the same day. There, although they had no intention of taking their seats, nor of participating in the proposed parliament for Southern Ireland, Sinn Féin candidates, under the leadership of Eamonn De Valera, won 125 of the 128 seats, all being elected unopposed.

In the North, the new Northern Ireland parliament was duly opened by King George V in Belfast City Hall in June 1921. In the south of the country, however, no such corresponding parliament, as was set out in the 1920 Act, was established. Things had moved on dramatically in that jurisdiction, in a far different direction, in the aftermath of the 1916 Easter Rising.

The executions of the ringleaders of the Rising, along with others who had played no part whatsoever in it, had provoked anger among the general population, which up until that point had been hostile to the Rebels and their cause. Within fourteen days of Pádraig Pearse's surrender, 90 Courts-martial, held under rules that were totally incompatible with

justice of any kind, had taken place and had resulted in many guilty verdicts and death penalties. However, responding to international outcry and pressure, a political decision was taken in London to cease this form of punishment after 16 executions had taken place. Those who had been sentenced to death were instead given life sentences of imprisonment. Over 3,000 people were interned in prison camps in Britain without trial, while Ireland remained under Martial Law. This tense situation deepened when Britain threatened to impose mass conscription in Ireland, to replace the thousands of British soldiers, including soldiers of the Irish Regiments of the British Army who had been killed in the First World War. Britain's Prime Minister, Lloyd George, linked the implementation of the Government of Ireland Act of 1914 with the enactment of the Military Service Bill, by making Home Rule conditional on conscription being enacted and implemented. In April 1918, the Irish Trade Unions and Labour Party, supported by Sinn Féin, called a 24-hour general strike against such a move. The Bill was passed, but was never implemented.

Release and Re-arrest of Prisoners

The prisoners, who had been interned without trial after the Rising, were released following an amnesty in June 1917. They immediately started to recruit volunteers for the newly invigorated Irish Republican Brotherhood and Irish Volunteers, with Michael Collins as Director of Organisation. Drilling and training began in secret. When many were again arrested, they refused to recognise the Courts' jurisdiction. When imprisoned, they embarked on hunger strikes, demanding that the British recognise their status as political prisoners.

Thomas Ashe (1885-1917)

One such prisoner was Thomas Ashe, from Lispole, County Kerry, who had been a member of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, as well as a member of the Irish Volunteers since its foundation. He had also been a Commandant during the Easter Rising and had, like so many others, been sentenced to death after its failure, with the punishment afterwards commuted to life imprisonment. Following his release from Frongoch Internment Camp in June 1917, after his first hunger strike, he was re-arrested and charged with sedition for making an incendiary speech in Ballinalee, County Longford. He was sentenced to two years in Mountjoy Prison, where, on 25 September, 1917, after embarking on another hunger strike, he died as a result of his lung being pierced whilst being force-fed.

His funeral was attended by 30,000 people. Michael Collins, in delivering the eulogy at his graveside in Glasnevin Cemetery, after a volley of shots had been fired by uniformed Irish Volunteers, simply said, *"Nothing additional remains to be said. That volley which we have just heard is the only speech which it is proper to make above the grave of a dead Fenian".*

The brutality of force-feeding was exposed during Ashe's inquest, which condemned the British for this inhuman punishment. The jury said, *"We find that the deceased, Thomas Ashe . . . died from heart failure and congestion of the lungs on 25 September, 1917; that his death was caused by the punishment of taking away from the cell bed, bedding and boots, and allowing him to be on the cold floor for 50 hours, and then subjecting him to forcible feeding in his weak condition after hunger striking for five or six days. We censure the Castle authorities for not acting more promptly, especially when the grave condition of the deceased and other prisoners was brought to their notice . . . [and] that the hunger strike was adopted against the inhuman punishment inflicted and a refusal of their demand to be treated as political prisoners".*[268]

As with many of the leaders of the Easter Rising, Thomas Ashe was a poet. Given that he was a member of the Keating Branch of the Gaelic League, we can assume he came under the influence of Father Patrick Dinneen[269] and had been initiated into the belief system of Ireland's Olden Ways. This assumption is strengthened by the content and style of the following poem, written by Ashe while he was in prison, demonstrating his humility, humanity, courage and spirituality.

Let Me Carry Your Cross For Ireland, Lord

Let me carry your Cross for Ireland, Lord
The hour of her trial draws near,
And the pangs and pains of the sacrifice
May be borne by comrades dear.

But, Lord, take me from the offering throng,
There are many far less prepared,
Though anxious and all as they are to die
That Ireland may be spared.

Let me carry your Cross for Ireland, Lord
My cares in this world are few.
And few are the tears will for me fall
When I go on my way to You.

[268] *www.historyireland.com/100-years-ago-thomas-ashe-dies-force-feeding-25-september-1917/.*
[269] See Chapter 6.

Spare. Oh! Spare to their loved ones dear
The brother and son and sire.
That the cause we love may never die
In the land of their Heart's desire!

Let me carry your Cross for Ireland, Lord!
Let me suffer the pain and shame
I bow my head to their rage and hate
And I take on myself the blame.

Let them do to my body whate'er they will,
My spirit I offer to You
That the faithful few who heard her call
May be spared to Roisín Dubh.

Let me carry your Cross for Ireland, Lord!
For Ireland weak with tears,
For the aged man of the clouded brow,
And the child of tender years;

For the empty homes of her golden plains;
For the hopes of her future, too!
Let me carry your cross for Ireland, Lord!
For the cause of Roisín Dubh.[270]

British General Election 1918[271]

On 14 December, 1918, a month after the First World War ended, a General Election for the entire Westminster parliament took place, which included the voting for the 105 seats designated for Ireland. The main political party in Ireland at that time was the Irish Parliamentary Party, which for years had confined its constitutional demands from Britain to the implementation of Home Rule. But for the general public, the possibility of full independence from Britain was now beginning to seem both possible and desirable. They started to look towards, and support, Sinn Féin,[272] which insisted on nothing short of a

[270] *Roisín Dubh*, Little Black Rose, originally a love song, was widely invoked in Irish poetry during Penal times to obliquely refer to Ireland.

[271] It is important to remember that the 1918 General Election took place before the Government of Ireland Act 1920 came into being, and that the said Act may be regarded as a British response to what happened in Ireland following the result of that General Election, *viz* partition.

[272] Sinn Féin, originally founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905, later merged with The Dungannon Clubs and Cumann na nGaedheal to become a political party in 1907. Although it was blamed by the British for the Easter Rising, its policy at that time had been for separation from Great Britain under a dual monarchy, along with greater independence than the Home Rule offered. Its members were not involved in the Easter Rising. Between 1917 and 1920 it fought by-elections in Ireland on a manifesto of securing Ireland's international recognition as an independent Republic. It won four by-election seats in 1917.

fully independent Republic. This was clearly set out in its Manifesto issued before the election, parts of which are set out below:

"General Election

"Manifesto to the Irish People

"The coming General Election is fraught with vital opportunities for the future of our nation. Ireland is faced with the question whether this generation wills it that she is to march out into the full sunlight of freedom, or is to remain in the shadow of a base imperialism that has brought and ever will bring in its train naught but evil for our race.

"Sinn Féin gives Ireland the opportunity of vindicating her honour and pushing with renewed confidence the path of national salvation by rallying to the flag of the Irish Republic.

"Sinn Féin aims at securing the establishment of that Republic.

1. *By withdrawing the Irish Representation from the British parliament and by denying the right and opposing will of the British government or any other foreign government to legislate for Ireland.*
2. *By making use of any and every means available to render impotent the power of England to hold Ireland in subjection by military force or otherwise.*
3. *By the establishment of a constituent assembly comprising persons chosen by Irish constituencies as the supreme national authority to speak and act in the name of the Irish people, and to develop Ireland's social, political and industrial life for the welfare of the whole people of Ireland".*

The Manifesto goes on to state Sinn Féin's intention to seek the recognition of Ireland as an Independent Nation at the Paris Peace Conference in accordance with the *"consent of the governed"* principle, pointing out that Ireland's claim to independence existed prior to the War and *". . . is based on our unbroken tradition of nationhood, on a unity and a national name which has never been challenged, on the possession of a distinctive national culture and social order, on the moral courage and dignity of our people in the face of alien aggression, on the fact that in nearly every generation, and five times within the past 120 years our people have challenged in arms the right of England to rule this country".*

The Manifesto stood by *"the Proclamation of the Provisional Government of Easter, 1916, reasserting the inalienable right of the Irish Nation to sovereign independence, reaffirming the determination of the Irish people to achieve it, and guaranteeing within the independent Nation equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens".*

In a section which warns of the disastrous effects of diluting or dissipating this principle of self-determination, the Manifesto, unwittingly or otherwise, gives a warning against possible future events in Ireland: *"The right of a sovereign nation to sovereign independence rests upon immutable natural law and cannot be made the subject of a compromise. Any attempt to barter away the sacred and inviolate rights of nationhood begins in dishonour and is bound to end in disaster".* As we shall see, this prescient warning turned out to be, unfortunately but undeniably, true.

Sinn Féin won a landslide victory in the 1918 General Election, by ousting the Irish Parliamentary Party as the main political party in Ireland and winning 73 out of a possible 105 seats. They held the majority in all seats except those in the north of Ireland, where Irish independence was utterly opposed by the unionist majority, which won 6 seats. However, in total, 70% of the Irish people had unequivocally voted for an independent Irish Republic, as set out in Sinn Féin's election manifesto.

The First Dáil Éireann 1919

Seizing their opportunity – even though most of the newly elected Sinn Féin MPs remained in English prisons – twenty-seven others refused to take up their newly won seats in the British House of Commons and instead assembled at the Mansion House in Dublin on 21 January, 1919, where they convened the first Dáil Éireann. There, an Irish Republic was declared, a President of the Republic was installed (Cathal Brugha) and the newly named TDs, *Teachtaí Dála,* Deputies to the *Dáil*, or Assembly, swore an oath to establish and defend the Republic as follows: *"We, the elected representatives of the ancient Irish people, ratify the establishment of the Irish Republic and pledge to make this declaration effective by every means at our command".*[273]

The Dáil's objectives included the protection of the new Republic; achieving international recognition for the new State; and continuing with an ongoing campaign to undermine British rule in Ireland by replacing its institutions with new republican ones.

The War of Independence 1919-1921

On the same day that the first Dáil Éireann was convened, 21 January 1919, two members of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), who had been escorting a consignment of explosives to Soloheadbeag in County Tipperary, were ambushed, shot and killed, and their explosives seized by members of the Irish Volunteers (later to become known as the Irish

[273] Declaration of Independence; see *https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Irish_Declaration_of_Independence.*

Republican Army). Although not officially sanctioned, this incident is seen as marking the beginning of the Irish War of Independence.

When it came to that war, Ireland was severely outnumbered in military strength compared to England. The IRA numbered around 15,000, although only 3,000 were active at any one time, while the British forces numbered approximately 20,000 (army), supported by a similar combined number of Royal Irish Constabulary, Auxiliaries, Black and Tans and Ulster Special Constabulary. Obviously, the Irish had to concentrate on inventive tactics if they were to beat their more heavily armed and more numerous opponents. This they did by organising mass campaigns of civil disobedience, by creating a sophisticated propaganda operation, by employing cunning guerrilla warfare strikes and by becoming experts at intelligence gathering.

Civil Disobedience

When Sinn Féin won local elections in 1920, they gained control of many Borough and Urban District Councils, whereupon they moved allegiance from Dublin Castle's Local Government Board for Ireland to the newly established, republican Department of Local Government. This gave them control of administration and finance in local areas, where they set up their own systems of justice administration (where in every Court the citing of British law was banned), as well as policing and tax collection. Before long, the general public shunned and boycotted the British institutions in favour of the republican ones.

Propaganda

When the British subjected civilians to reprisal punishments and killings, Sinn Féin provided the world's media with evidence of same, thus intensifying criticism against Britain, especially in America, where Sinn Féin used its contacts to put pressure on Britain to agree to a settlement.

When the British, long-standing experts in propaganda, insisted on calling republican soldiers 'murderers', Sinn Féin and the IRA were at pains to point out that Ireland was at war with Britain and that Irish combatants were soldiers. One compelling defence of a liberation army's resorting to different methods of war has been written by Giovanni Costigan, who stated,

"[t]he difficulty of determining what is murder and what is a legitimate act is one that troubles the student of all these wars of liberation – from Ireland to Vietnam. 'Sophisticated weapons', as they are now called, are always regarded as legitimate; whereas the primitive methods of the guerrilla

fighter are disallowed. It is permissible to destroy human beings with napalm dropped from B.52s, but not with small plastic bombs carried on a bicycle (though the loss of life in the latter is far less than that resulting from saturation bombing".[274]

Costigan quotes with approval the writings of General Georgios Grivas, who fought in the Cypriot War of Independence which saw Cyprus free itself from British imperial rule. He wrote:

"Our use of execution groups came in for criticism on the part of our opponents, who called us 'murderers' because we struck from behind. Such a charge is, to say the least, naïve, because to kill your opponent by assailing him at his weakest point, from the side or rear, is a tactic as old as Alexander the Great, Epaminondas and Marathon, and in more modern times was adopted during the wars of Frederick the Great and Napoleon. What would the critics say of a general if he were to make a frontal attack against a much stronger opponent, thereby leading his soldiers to a useless death? They would of course demand that he be Court-marshalled or at least cashiered. What would they say on the other hand, if another general, by a skilful manoeuvre brought his troops to his opponent's rear and directed his men's fire at the enemy's back? Far from calling him a murderer they would applaud him".[275]

Guerrilla Warfare

The IRA began a campaign of ambushing the RIC and attacking, looting and burning their barracks. This strategy exposed the RIC at their weakest point, forcing them to abandon their buildings and place themselves in a situation where they could then be shot by rifle fire. In addition, the IRA could then raid the barracks and add to their own munitions store. The success of this strategy can be seen from the fact that at Easter 1920, 315 barracks were attacked and destroyed by the IRA in a single night, an event that signalled beyond doubt that the IRA was at war with Britain, however much British propaganda tried to downplay the importance and significance of the conflict by insisting that IRA killings constituted 'murder' rather than acts of war.

The RIC was by no means a civilian police force: it was a paramilitary force, with an extensive range of weaponry at its disposal. RIC men had been under orders to carry out surveillance on their own countrymen and women, including those involved in Sinn Féin,

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[274] G Costigan, *The Anglo-Irish Conflict, 1919-1922: A War of Independence or Systematised Murder?*, Edinburgh University Press, University Review (Spring, 1968), vol. 5, no. 1, p. 68.
[275] G Grivas, *General Grivas in Guerrilla Warfare* (1962), pp. 11-12, quoted in G Costigan, *op. cit.*, at p. 68.

the Gaelic League and the Irish Volunteers. Ernie O'Malley, who took part in the 1916 Rising, and was an IRA training officer during the War of Independence, called the RIC *"the eyes of the military"*.[276]

A two-year campaign to ostracise RIC men from society, and prevent new recruits, was so successful that, by 1919, a large number of the force had resigned, forcing the government in England to introduce a recruitment campaign. This campaign resulted in the enlisting of veteran British soldiers of the First World War, as well as ex-criminals, as RIC reinforcements, thereby creating the infamous Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans. What these new recruits to the RIC lacked in local knowledge and surveillance techniques, they more than made up for in arbitrary brutality against local populations. Their cruel and vicious tactics even surpassed those of the mainstream RIC, whom Eamon De Valera described as *"agents of a foreign usurper . . . whose history [was] a continuity of brutal treason against their own people"*.[277]

IRA Flying Columns

The Auxiliaries and the Black and Tans had been given 'special powers' to restore order; but the fighting did not stop. They were indiscriminate in their attacks on innocent civilians, many of them ferocious. To counteract this new strategy, the IRA formed flying columns and fought a guerrilla war against them. These small groups of volunteers lived 'on the run', sleeping in the open, or in 'safe houses', never staying in the same place twice, and adopting a strategy of 'hit and run' on the enemy.

Being mobile and carrying little in the way of belongings or equipment, it was difficult for the enemy to track, locate and fight these IRA men head on. They attacked barracks to commandeer arms, ambushed and attacked vehicles carrying British troops, robbed trains of supplies and intercepted mail to find out who was giving information to British intelligence headquarters at Dublin Castle. They were fed, bedded and otherwise supported by local people, including the clergy. Their method of communication with other flying columns was by dispatch rider, where the women of Cumann na mBan *"formed the steel backbone of IRA communications and its intelligence work. Less likely to be searched or arrested, the women were able to carry dispatches through enemy lines. Eithne Coyle, who reported on disposition and movement of troops in Roscommon in 1920, and recalled that her*

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[276] E O'Malley, *On Another Man's Wound* (1936), p. 152.
[277] S William Gannon, *The Black and Tans and Auxiliaries – An Overview*, at *https://wwwtheirishstory.com.*

'knees often trembled' when pedalling past the Black and Tans, 'especially late at night on lonely roads' ".[278]

Intelligence Gathering

Cumann na mBan members also played an important role in gathering intelligence for the IRA.

"Women who lived near RIC stations were a crucial link in the IRA intelligence chain and post office workers, such as Siobhan Creedon in Mallow, played an important role in intercepting, copying and passing on to the IRA communications intended for the military and police. Republican women who worked in shops, public houses and restaurants also found opportunities to gather intelligence . . . Civilian intelligence operatives such as Lily Mernin in Dublin Castle and Josephine Marchment Brown in Cork's military barracks . . . provided a vital stream of information on British Intelligence Officers, equipment, planned raids and troop movements".[279]

Apart from the RIC, another important source of information on the British side was their spy network of intelligence officers, posing as civilians under false names, and operating out of Dublin Castle. One even posed as a priest in order to obtain information from the confessional.[280]

As Giovanni Costigan states, *"Since 1798, every rebellion in Irish history had been doomed to failure by the ubiquitous presence of the spies and informers of Dublin Castle. Michael Collins . . . was determined that in this instance, at least, history should not repeat itself. For the first time, the Irish developed a system of counter-intelligence superior to that of the British with all their experience in such work. It penetrated local government offices, the Post Office, the Customs – it even reached into Dublin Castle itself, so that Collins was far better informed about the movements of the British than they were about the activities of the IRA".*[281]

On what became known as Bloody Sunday, November 21, 1920, the IRA shot and killed fourteen people, including six members of the so-called 'Cairo Gang' in Dublin, as well as two Auxiliaries. The accomplishment of this assignment, which *"virtually destroyed the*

[278] UCC, *The Irish Revolution Project, Scoil na Staire/Tíreolaíocht, Cumann na mBan and the War of Independence*.
[279] *Ibid.*
[280] P Beaslí, *Michael Collins and the Making of Ireland,* 2 vols. (1926), II, p. 63.
[281] G Costigan, *op. cit.,* p. 77.

British spy system in Ireland"[282] owed its success to the intelligence work of 'the squad' of Michael Collins, IRA Director of Intelligence.

Needless to say, the British retaliated against this attack on their most professional and sophisticated intelligence network. They sent a force of RIC, military and Auxiliaries to Croke Park that same afternoon where, at a GAA match between Dublin and Tipperary, a charity event to raise funds for the Republican Prisoners Dependents Fund, they shot and killed twelve people and wounded 60-100. Whereas the IRA had been selective and had only targeted people whom they knew to be associated with spying for the British, the British retaliated by brutally and indiscriminately killing and wounding innocent civilians and by instilling terror into ten thousand harmless onlookers.

This difference in approach, and the observation of normal rules of conduct during war, was a deliberate strategy of Michael Collins, as it had been for Pearse and Connolly in the GPO during the Rising. *"As in 1916, when the Volunteers were careful to see that British prisoners came to no harm even in the inferno of the Post Office, so now the IRA, whatever their method of dealing with informers, were usually careful to provide for the welfare of the British military whom they captured. General Lucas, after his escape from captivity in 1920, praised the treatment he had received. One of his captors he praised as 'the most perfect gentleman he'd ever met' ".*[283]

Other leading British military men gave similar accounts, e.g. General Sir Henry Lawson stated that the IRA officers were *"transparently sincere and single-minded, idealists, highly religious for the most part, and even with an almost mystical sense of duty to their country . . . They fought against drunkenness and self-indulgence . . . as a class, they represented all that was best in the countryside . . . The IRA seem to be particularly free from ruffians of the professional type . . . Behind their organisation there is the spirit of a nation – of a nation which is certainly not in favour of murder, but which, on the whole, sympathises with them and believes that members of the IRA are fighting for the cause of the Irish people".*[284]

The British forces, on the other hand, had no qualms about breaching the rules of war, using reprisals, torturing prisoners, hanging prisoners and using prisoners as hostages and shields from attack by the enemy.

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[282] R Taylor, *Michael Collins* (1958), pp. 126-127.
[283] P Beaslí, *op. cit.*, II, p. 31.
[284] Sir H Lawson, *A Soldier in Ireland,* quoted in D Macardle, *The Irish Republic* (1937), p. 343.

One notable example of the hanging and torturing of prisoners was that of Kevin Barry, a young medical student from a middle-class family, barely eighteen years old, who was studying medicine at the University College Dublin. As a young boy he had joined the Fianna Éireann, the youth organisation set up by Constance Markievicz; had witnessed James Larkin and James Connolly in action during the Dublin Lock Out of 1913;[285] had joined the Irish Volunteers at the age of 15 years; and had joined the Irish Republican Brotherhood at the age of 16 years.

After he was recruited, he had spent most of his time in training, and in sourcing weapons and ammunition, and had not had much experience in the field. When he was 18 years old he took part in an ambush at Monks' Bakery in Dublin on 20 September, 1920, during which one British soldier was shot and killed. Another two were badly injured and died later of their wounds. Most of the raiding party escaped, but Kevin Barry was captured and arrested.

Under questioning, Barry refused to reveal the names of the others involved in the ambush. In an attempt to save his life, Sinn Féin arranged for Barry to prepare and sign an Affidavit, some days before his execution, with the intention of publishing it in the British and world press. In it, Barry swore of his interrogator, *". . . He tried to persuade me to give the names, and I persisted in refusing. He then sent the sergeant out of the room for a bayonet. When it was brought in the sergeant was ordered, by the same officer, to point the bayonet at my stomach . . . The sergeant then said that he would run the bayonet into me if I did not tell . . . the same officer then said to me that if I persisted in my attitude he would turn me out to the men in the barrack square, and he supposed I knew what that meant with the men in their present*

[285] The Dublin Lockout lasted from August 1913 to January 1914. It involved 300 employers and 20,000 workers and was an attempt by employer William Martin Murphy to prevent unskilled workers joining a Trade Union in pursuance of better wages and working conditions, at a time when living conditions in Dublin's tenements were deplorable. James Larkin set up the Irish Transport and General Workers Union in Dublin, catering for skilled and unskilled workers. Membership rose from 4,000 to 10,000 between 1911 and 1913. Together with James Connolly, the Belfast organiser of the ITGWU, Larkin set up the Irish Labour Party. Murphy was owner of Clery's department store and the Imperial Hotel, as well as controller of the Dublin United Tramway Company, the Irish Independent, the Evening Herald and the Irish Catholic newspapers. He was also a shareholder in B&I Shipping Line and a former MP. He sacked 70 workers whom he suspected of being members of the ITGWU. Other employers followed suit, sacking workers and employing blackleg replacements from England. The employers were supported by the Catholic Church. Picketing strikers were attacked by the Dublin Metropolitan Police, injuring hundreds and killing two. The strike ended in failure, with Larkin departing to America and Connolly going on to fight in the Easter Rising. Many of the workers, blacklisted as a result of the strike, joined British Army regiments in Ireland and fought in the First World War, having no other source of income to provide for their families.

temper. I said nothing. He ordered the sergeants to put me face down on the floor and twist my arm . . . When I lay on the floor, one of the sergeants knelt on my back, the other two placed one foot each on my back and left shoulder, and the man who knelt on me twisted my right arm, holding it by the wrist with one hand, while he held my hair with the other to pull back my head. This continued, to the best of my judgment, for five minutes. It was very painful . . . I still persisted in refusing to answer these questions . . . a civilian came in and repeated these questions, with the same result. He informed me that if I gave all the information I knew I could get off".[286]

Despite the media interest and international outrage, on 20 October, 1920, Barry was tried by Court-martial under the Restoration of Order in Ireland Act, 1920. He refused, as a soldier of the Irish Republic, to recognise the Court. The verdict was guilty, the accused to be punished by death by hanging. The English, repeatedly refusing to recognise that they were engaged in a war, persisted in claiming that every death caused by the IRA was murder and that the guilty should hang. Barry had hoped for a death by firing squad. After all, he had been tried in a Military Court, just as the Easter Rising leaders had, and he wanted to die as a soldier of the Republic, not as a common murderer.

On the day of his hanging, 1 November, 1920, he met his death with courage and acceptance. The priest who attended him, while previously unsympathetic, is said to have told Barry's mother that he was *"one of the bravest and best boys I have ever known. His death was one of the most holy, and your dear boy is waiting for you now, beyond the reach of sorrow or trial".*[287]

Kevin Barry's body was buried in the prison grounds, near the women's prison, alongside nine others who were also hanged in Mountjoy Prison during the War of Independence. It was not until 14 October, 2001, that they were given a state funeral and their remains removed to a Republican Plot in Glasnevin Cemetery, Dublin. Among the many tributes given to Barry in the years after his death, two stand out. The first, a beautiful stained-glass window from the studio of Harry Clark, installed at the Earlsfort Terrace campus of University College Dublin, where Barry had been a student, and now relocated to the Belfield campus. The second, a sorrowful, but nonetheless rousing, rebel song which was composed and handed down through the years, commemorating Barry's life and

[286] This Affidavit was written by Seán Ó hUadhaigh, Solicitor, witnessed by Myles Keogh, Justice of the Peace and sworn and signed by Kevin Barry. The original is in the National Museum of Ireland.
[287] D O'Donovan, *Kevin Barry and His Time* (Dublin, 1989), p. 15.

martyrdom. Kevin Barry may not have been a poet, but he has been suitably remembered in the following ballad.

Kevin Barry

In Mountjoy Jail one Monday morning
High Upon the Gallows Tree,
Kevin Barry gave his young life
For the cause of Liberty;
Just a lad of eighteen summers
Yet there's no one can deny,
As he walked to death that morning
He proudly held his head on high.

Chorus:
Shoot me like an Irish soldier.
Do not hang me like a dog.
For I fought to free old Ireland
On that still September morn.
All around the little bakery
Where we fought them hand to hand,
Shoot me like an Irish soldier,
For I fought to free Ireland.

Just before he faced his hangman
In his dreary prison cell,
British soldiers tortured Barry
Just because he would not tell
The names of his brave comrades,
And other things they wished to know,
"Stand informer or we'll kill you!"
Kevin Barry answered, "No!"

Calmly standing to attention
While he bade his last farewell,
To his broken-hearted mother
Whose grief no one can tell.

For the cause he proudly cherished
This sad parting had to be,
Then to death walked softly smiling
That old Ireland might be free.

Another martyr for old Ireland
Another murder for the Crown,
Whose brutal laws may kill the Irish
But can't keep their spirit down;
Lads like Barry are no cowards
From the foe they will not fly,
Lads like Barry will free Ireland
For her cause they'll live and die.[288]

Because of Kevin Barry and people like him, fifteen thousand IRA volunteers, lacking sufficient arms and ammunition for their needs, aided by a largely unarmed force of revolutionary women, managed to bring to the negotiating table the government of a far superior armed force that, at its height in 1922, *"was the largest empire the world had ever seen, covering around a quarter of the Earth's land surface and ruling over 458 million people"*.[289]

The Kilmichael Ambush

In the same month as Barry's hanging and the Bloody Sunday killings, November 1920, an IRA flying column ambushed and killed 17 Auxiliaries at Kilmichael in west Cork. In December, Martial Law was declared in Munster and Cork city centre was burned down by the Black and Tans in reprisal for further ambushes. By the end of 1920, 1,500 people had been killed and 6,000 republicans had been imprisoned. Attempts by the British to call a truce were rejected by the IRA. The British began executing prisoners. The IRA retaliated by shooting their British prisoners and informers.

[288] This balled (composer unknown) has been performed by many famous musicians, including the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Makem, The Wolfe Tones, Christy Moore, Paul Robeson and Leonard Cohen. It was banned by the BBC during the Troubles in the North, but nevertheless remains one of the most well-known and popular songs of the Irish struggle for independence.
[289] *https://www.natgeokids.com*

The Custom House Set On Fire

In May 1921, following orders from the President of the Irish Republic, Eamonn De Valera, for a momentous show of strength from the IRA, one of Britain's most important administrative buildings in Ireland, the Custom House, was attacked and set on fire. It was the biggest single operation of the War of Independence, involving as it did over 100 IRA volunteers. The building burned for 5 days and was destroyed, as were local government archives dating back hundreds of years. In the exchange of fire with the Auxiliaries afterwards, five IRA volunteers and four civilians were killed. Eighty IRA members were subsequently arrested.

In the north of the country, sectarian attacks by unionists and Protestants against nationalists and Catholics were widespread, as was the sacking of Catholic workers in the Belfast shipyards, and the burning out of Catholic homes in mixed areas. This situation led to riots in Derry and Belfast, to deal with which an armed, unionist Ulster Special Constabulary had been formed.

Truce Agreed

In July 1921, an official truce between the sides was agreed, signed by General Macready of the British Army on behalf of Britain, and Commandant Barton and Commandant Duggan of the IRA for the Irish. The terms of the truce document referred to opposing sides as 'the British Army' and the 'Irish Army' (no mention being made here of so-called 'Irish murderers'). And so began negotiations which, it was hoped, would lead to an end to the conflict and a solution to the Irish demand for independence.

Not surprisingly, numerous accounts and assessments by historians, and others, exist of the negotiations between Britain and Ireland leading up to the signing of a Peace Treaty on 6 December, 1921. This was clearly a defining moment in the history of Ireland, which resulted in monumental, life-changing consequences for the country and her people. As a result of the Treaty, the country gained a significant degree of independence from Britain, but remained divided, not only between north and south, but now, additionally, among republicans themselves: between IRA members supporting the Treaty and IRA members opposed to the Treaty; between brothers and sisters and between fathers and sons of the same family; and between erstwhile comrades on different sides of the argument, who attacked and killed each other in the resulting Civil War. Nowadays, one hundred years on, the divisions have barely healed. Rather, they still dominate the composition of the

political scene in Ireland, north and south, and remain a source of great personal and familial pain and sorrow.

Peace Negotiations and Peace Treaty

This work now takes a close look at the peace negotiations and especially at the role played by the British side, led by Prime Minister Lloyd George. For not only in acts of violence and war, during a period spanning several centuries, had the British acted with cruelty, dishonour and indifference to the suffering of the Irish population, they now also used their skills in the 'dark arts' of duplicity, covert surveillance, intimidation, blackmail, and 'divide and rule' tactics to negotiate 'peace'. It was to be a peace on their terms only as, following the signing of the Treaty, the British did not become innocent bystanders. They retained a part of Ireland – six of the nine counties of the Ulster – which was granted devolved government as a constituent entity within the United Kingdom. In addition, they assisted, and indeed ordered, one side in the south of the country (those in favour of the Treaty) to attack the other side (those against the Treaty), aided by British weapons and artillery. In this way, not alone did the British split the Irish territory, they split the unity of the Irish people. The British were not stupid. This outcome was not an unintended consequence. If they had to give up control of Ireland, they were determined not to leave empty-handed, and to leave behind an almighty mess in their wake.

It seems to this writer, having been born and raised outside of Ireland, of Ulster Catholic parents, and with no known relatives involved in the Irish Civil War, that in that war the Irish were being deliberately manipulated into blaming, fighting, and holding grudges against the wrong enemy: the issues that divided them were deliberately created by Britain and should have been blamed on the British, not on each other.

The analysis selected here to chronicle the events of the Treaty negotiations, the Treaty itself and the resulting Civil War, is based on a book published in 1997, by Vincent MacDowell, entitled *Michael Collins and the Brotherhood*.[290] Others may disagree with MacDowell's analysis, and they are entitled to do so. But then, no single account of the Treaty negotiations, and its aftermath, has yet satisfied everyone.

To this writer, MacDowell's analysis makes a lot of sense. He sums up his own approach to the topic in this way: *"This book is not a simple historical novel, nor is it an official, documented*

[290] V MacDowell, *Michael Collins and the Irish Republican Brotherhood* (1997).

chronicle of agreed facts. It is a hybrid – faction, tailored to fit the facts on the sound scientific principle that the simplest hypothesis that fits all the facts is usually the right one".[291]

MacDowell lays bare the intense rivalry between Eamonn De Valera and Michael Collins, the former being the self-styled President of the Irish Republic and the latter being the appointed President of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. While De Valera emerges from the events in question as a staunch, non-compromising republican, and Collins as a man who compromised too much, in fact Collins was the more extreme of the two, and De Valera the more moderate. Within the cabinet, De Valera was weak, and did the bidding of the more hard-line Austin Stack and Cathal Brugha. In return, he was protected by those men from any possible coup attempt by Michael Collins. And while Collins came across as an extreme republican in his public utterances, in private he was far more practically minded as to what could be achieved from Britain during the negotiations. It is fair to say that De Valera was more concerned with conserving his own position of power, while Collins was more concerned with putting the country first, and achieving a good, practical result. As McDowell states, *". . . Lloyd-George early on sniffed the possibility of driving a wedge between the two men as the first part of his campaign to create as many fissures as possible in the ranks of Sinn Féin, and he had an early success".*[292]

Firstly, the British wanted the truce to last for as long as possible, thus making it more difficult for the IRA to resume fighting, and rendering them less assured that the country would want to go back to a state of war should the truce break down. McDowell quotes Tom Barry who wrote, *"[t]hey knew that our morale and effectiveness were bound to deteriorate over a long period. All the British forces were housed in barracks . . . But what was our guerrilla force going to do for six months? . . . I estimated that by the time the Treaty was signed there was at least a thirty per cent loss in our effectiveness, structures and our morale. And this was a carefully calculated policy by the British".*[293]

In July 1921, a preliminary meeting to agree the terms of reference for the Treaty talks was held, where the Irish delegation included De Valera, but did not include Collins, despite his vigorous objections. De Valera and Lloyd George met privately, which they did on several later occasions. Lloyd George insisted there were two matters which the British would not deviate from: one was preserving the existence of Northern Ireland, as

[291] *Ibid.,* p. ix.
[292] *Ibid.,* p. 93.
[293] *Ibid.,* p. 93.

established under the 1920 Government of Ireland Act; and the other that, no matter what the agreed outcome, the Irish would have to profess loyalty to the Commonwealth and the Crown.

De Valera refused to accept those pre-defined parameters. He told his adversary that he, as President of the Republic, could not agree to relinquish that Republic. After two months Lloyd George suggested he should send someone else to negotiate, and that a fresh invitation could be issued, where the British government would meet an Irish delegation *"with a view to ascertaining how the association of Ireland within the community of nations known as the British Empire, may best be reconciled with the Irish national aspirations"*.

This was a far cry from the initial invitation of Lloyd George to De Valera, extended on 24 June, 1921, to attend a conference *"to explore the possibility of a settlement"*, which invitation was made *"with a fervent desire to end the ruinous conflict which has for centuries divided Ireland, and embittered relations of the peoples of these two islands, who ought to live in neighbourly harmony with each other, and whose co-operation would mean so much, not only to the Empire, but to humanity"*.[294] De Valera had replied, on 8 July, 2021, *"I am ready to meet and discuss with you on what basis such a conference as that proposed can reasonably hope to achieve the object desired"*.[295]

It took De Valera two months to accept that Lloyd George would not budge on Northern Ireland and would not budge on insisting on a future Ireland's loyalty to the King and Commonwealth. At that point, if not long before, he should have withdrawn from the initial negotiations and allowed hostilities to recommence. Instead, he allowed himself to be manipulated by the British Prime Minister, and, acted in a clear, premeditated attempt to distance himself from what he now realised would be the end result, an outcome that no one on the Irish side, apart from himself, was yet aware of. A bonus for De Valera was that he could, and would, set Collins up to take the blame for the inevitable outcome.

At a cabinet meeting to discuss the second invitation to attend talks, De Valera was adamant he would not lead the delegation and instead proposed that he would stay in Dublin and send *"the one man who was most dangerous to any compromise to London to make that compromise"*.[296] He proposed Collins and Griffith as joint leaders. Despite Collins' resistance, De Valera's will prevailed.

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[294] *Ibid.*, pp. 88-89.
[295] *Ibid.*, p. 89.
[296] *Ibid.*, p. 95.

The changing of the terms of reference for the Treaty talks, as set out in the second invitation from Lloyd George, for talks which were to start on 11 October, set the seal on Ireland's fate. As MacDowell states,

"It was probably the most important communication between the two leaders, and quite certainly, in retrospect with the wisdom that hindsight gives, it was clear that the Irish should not have accepted that invitation for that conference on those grounds. There was no need to go to London to say No! Collins later himself said that '[t]he communication . . . from Lloyd George made it clear that they were going into a conference, not on the recognition of the Irish Republic, but if we all stood on the recognition of the Republic as a prelude to any conference, we could have easily said no, and there would have been no conference. It was the acceptance of the invitation that formed the first compromise' ".

This view was shared by cabinet and delegation member Robert Barton, when he stated, *" 'In these preliminaries the English refused to recognise us as acting on behalf of the Irish Republic, and the fact that we agreed to negotiate on any other basis at all, was possibly, the primary cause of our downfall' ".*[297]

The Irish delegation, on their first attendance at Downing Street, carried credentials on behalf of the Irish Republic and President De Valera, which stated that their remit, as Envoys Plenipotentiary, was to *"negotiate and conclude on behalf of Ireland with the representatives of His Britannic Majesty, George V, a Treaty or Treaties of Settlement, Association and Accommodation between Ireland and the Community of Nations known as the British Commonwealth".*

Note, there was no recognition there of what we, nowadays, would call Lloyd George's 'red lines'. But the Irish delegation were, as yet, unaware of those red lines, and the other members of the British delegation were not given the opportunity to examine the Irish credentials, which they might have objected to before the meeting began, as Lloyd George orchestrated the introductions and seating arrangements in such a way that, firstly, no handshakes were needed between opposite sides and, secondly, such formalities as inspecting credentials could be avoided. Lloyd George had again shown his skills of mastery and manipulation.

As for Ireland's joint leaders of the delegation, Arthur Griffith, although he had established Sinn Féin, was a moderate and was quite prepared to make compromises on the unity of

[297] *Ibid.,* pp. 94-95.

Ireland, the Crown and total independence; and Collins, who had lived for long periods in London prior to the War of Independence and the Easter Rising, and had a good knowledge of the strength of British attachment to their Empire and Crown, knew he might have to compromise on these, but he was resolute on his firmness not to compromise on Irish unity i.e. the North would have to be included in the settlement as a constituent part of Ireland.

The three other delegate members, it seemed, would go along with what Collins and Griffith decided. They were: Robert Barton (Secretary of State for Economic Affairs), a Protestant ex-British Army officer; George Gavan Duffy, a lawyer, who was principled and reliable, but was out of his depth compared with the British negotiating team; and Eamonn Duggan another lawyer.

The British team consisted of Prime Minister David Lloyd George, Lord Birkenhead (Lord Chancellor), Austin Chamberlain (Lord Privy Seal) and Winston Churchill (Secretary of State for the Colonies). Others were also in attendance on the British side, along with advisors, both inside the negotiating room and outside of it.

In contrast, the Irish team had only Tim Healy[298] as an external advisor, and he had to travel back and forward to Ireland to report progress and seek further instructions. In terms of resources available, the British were at a distinct advantage. But Ireland had on their side the charismatic figure of Michael Collins, whose warmth of personality, and powers of persuasion, had a relaxing effect on his British enemies, who soon found themselves on friendly terms with him and the other Irish delegates, despite their previous antipathy. Collins was also cunning: despite Griffith and himself being joint leaders of the Irish delegation, they agreed to put Griffith forward as the leader when in conference with the British, with Collins acting out a more secondary role, when in fact the opposite was the reality. This ploy succeeded for some time before the British realised the deception.

When the tedious negotiating work of each day was finished, members of both delegations often came together as guests of society hostess, Lady Lavery, at the Cromwell Place residence of her and her husband, Sir John Lavery, the famous artist. McDowell claims it was well accepted that she and Collins were lovers, by her admission, and that this relationship was to prove a factor in his later downfall. There were also credible rumours

[298] Tim Healy had been an Irish Parliamentary Party member of the Westminster parliament since the 1880s, under Charles Stewart Parnell's leadership. After the Irish Free State was brought into being, he became the first Governor-General, representing the British King.

about Collins fraternising with other society women, including Lady Edith Londonderry, wife of Lord Londonderry, and Lady Moya Llewelyn Davies, with whom, it is claimed, he had previously fathered a child. As McDowell points out, *"The mixture of sex and statesmanship may not have been harmful in another context, but in Michael Collins' perilous position, it was foolish. It was, after all, a traditional weapon of the Empire, used with success in the past"*.[299]

In addition to his negotiating duties, and his socialising, Collins kept in touch with, and reported back to, the Irish Republican Brotherhood; and he was also involved in negotiating arms shipments on the Continent, in readiness for a breakdown of the Treaty negotiations and a resumption of war. But, unknown to him, *"Lloyd George's . . . spies monitored every move of Collins, and noted the details of every imprudent assignation, and every incident of internal disagreement in the Irish delegation"*.[300]

Meanwhile, as the talks in London continued, Griffith and Collins realised that they would have to give way on several issues, such as accepting some form of Dominion status for Ireland and an oath of loyalty to the King. But they remained resolute that they would not concede on a United Ireland and would not abandon the North. In addition they would make sure that any concessions they did make could be reviewed and developed over time. Griffith worked hard to prevent the talks from collapsing and was intent on bringing back an agreement to Dublin. On his suggestion, the plenary negotiations split into smaller groups to work out compromises, free from the tensions of the wider group. He also kept the cabinet in Dublin aware of all the latest discussions and developments, but felt the Irish negotiators were not receiving adequate feedback from home. De Valera was furious regarding Griffith's information that the British would not budge on acceptance of the Crown, but would probably trade a United Ireland to keep this demand, (a position he already knew about, given that Lloyd George had previously made it perfectly clear to him).

In his reply to Griffith on this point, De Valera was adamant that this outcome would not be acceptable, and that going back to war was preferable. The Irish delegation then

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[299] V MacDowell, *op. cit.,* p. 99. It should be pointed out that other writers, historians and researchers have taken an opposing view of this controversial opinion, e.g. Meda Ryan is adamant that Collins remained faithful to his then Irish fiancée Kitty Kiernan and did not have an affair with Lady Lavery. Similarly, she refutes the allegation that he was the father of Moya Llewelyn Davies' son Richard who, she claims, was born before the two met. See M Ryan, *Michael Collins and the Women Who Spied for Ireland* (Cork, 2006).

[300] *Ibid.,* p. 102.

threatened to walk out of the talks and return to Dublin, claiming that their negotiating ability was being hindered. Collins announced to the other delegates, knowing the threat would get back to De Valera, that he was returning to Ireland and would be joining a flying column for the resumption of war that De Valera was making inevitable. The Irish cabinet caved in. De Valera wrote that he was merely keeping the delegation aware of the opinions of the cabinet members and was not tying the hands of the plenipotentiaries. On their return, the cabinet would meet and form a policy.

But when the delegation did return to Dublin on 23 November, 1922, De Valera had added a new dimension to the Irish mix, with talk of decommissioning the old Army and issuing new commissions to Army officers, on condition of their taking an oath of loyalty to the Republic.

Collins had private talks with GHQ staff of the old Army, and with the Supreme Council of the IRB, prior to the next cabinet meeting. He was informed by the Council that they would, reluctantly, accept the oath of loyalty, to be drafted by Charteris.[301] They thanked and encouraged the delegation in their efforts in London. When the cabinet subsequently met, the members were told by the Army GHQ staff that there was no need to change the Army status. The proposal was defeated. De Valera was furious and the antagonism between himself and Collins had only increased. As MacDowell claims,

"*[t]he rift between Collins and De Valera was now out in the open, and so far, it had little to do with politics or the Treaty terms, but much more to do with the fatal claim of the Brotherhood that their secret President was also the invisible President of the Republic*".[302]

The cabinet meeting, chaired by De Valera, was an unpleasant one, with no votes taken, no decisions reached and no clear instructions given to the plenipotentiaries. As MacDowell observes,

"Collins was very largely silent during the futile discussions, and it seems that he had little respect for the cabinet proceedings. He did state, baldly, that the non-acceptance of the proposed Treaty terms would be a gamble with peace or war, and England could arrange war within a week. He would hold the line on Ulster, but it might be necessary to concede on other peripheral matters. There was no definite instructions from this meeting, despite the fact that the Irish delegation were to meet the British team within two days for a final decision".[303]

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[301] John Charteris was a member of the Irish delegation's secretariat.
[302] *Ibid.,* p. 107.
[303] *Ibid.,* p. 108.

However, as Collins again made his way back to London, he met with, and received secret instructions from the IRB, to the effect that (a) the amended oath of allegiance to the British King, with new wording composed by Charteris, would be tolerated; (b) Britain's proposals for Ireland's coastal defences would be left to the discretion of the plenipotentiaries; and (c) there could be no agreement to partition, with the negotiations allowed to break down on this last point if necessary.

Collins and Lloyd George met the next day and came close to an agreement. The Prime Minister agreed to try and get William Craig on board and suggested some form of devolved, reserved status for a very small area of Ulster, mentioning 2-and-a-half counties, with a Boundary Commission to determine the actual size. Although having doubts and misgivings about the confusion surrounding this issue, Collins agreed that Ireland would join the Commonwealth on the acceptance by Britain that any form of devolved local government within the North would be overseen by, and would report to, an Irish Dáil sitting in Dublin.

As for the Oath of Allegiance, the new changes, devised by John Charteris and the IRB, were agreed by Lloyd George. They would see elected representatives first swearing loyalty to the Irish Free State, and, in a subordinate clause, loyalty also to the King. All references to the British Empire would be replaced by references to the Commonwealth. In addition, the British navy would be allowed to operate out of Cork Harbour, Bantry Bay and Lough Swilly, with Ireland taking responsibility for her own defences elsewhere. There would be a review of these arrangements after five years.

However, the Irish delegates then became aware that Griffith had entered into a secret agreement with Lloyd George and had given a written assurance that he would sign the Treaty, whether or not William Craig agreed to its terms for Ulster. Astounded, Collins remained adamant that a United Ireland was essential, and that Craig would have to accept the decision of the Irish people. At this, according to MacDowell, *"Lloyd George turned nasty. He pretended that he had always understood that Griffith spoke for the delegation as a whole, and in this matter, of peace or war, each of the plenipotentiaries would have to sign a Treaty document and undertake to recommend it, otherwise there would be no agreement"*.[304]

Lloyd George then dramatically produced two letters, both addressed to William Craig, to be delivered by British Navy destroyer escort to him that evening, one stating that there

[304] *Ibid.,* p. 111.

was an agreement by the Irish delegation to a Treaty, with terms enclosed; the other stating that the Irish had failed to reach an agreement, and there were no proposals to send to him. This latter document, Lloyd George warned, would be the signal for *"an immediate and terrible war"*.

Collins and his colleagues then tried to reduce the length of time within the proposed Treaty whereby the North would be given time to decide on whether to join the new Free State or stay within the United Kingdom. They managed to have this time period reduced from one year to one month. (But, unknown to the Irish side, the British already knew that Craig would never agree to join the new Free State.) Then the British, on a pre-arranged signal, apparently over some protest made by the Irish side, stood up and declared the talks over. It was all part of a bluff by the British. The meeting was rearranged for later that evening for a final decision.

The Irish delegation were dispirited and split. Collins was angry and troubled. But much worse was to come. Lady Lavery and Lady Moya Llewellyn-Davis arrived at the delegation headquarters and urged Collins to come with them urgently. When they arrived at the Lavery home, Collins was taken into a room where a young boy of nine years was playing the piano.

"He had a bushy shock of brown hair and keen grey eyes. It was young Richard Llewellyn-Davis. It was a poignant moment, and Collins and Moya looked at their child with strained and tragic faces, as Hazel told them of the threat that had emanated from Lloyd George's quarters.

"The first part of the British plan was, that if there was to be immediate and terrible war to be waged upon the Irish, the Irish government would first be destroyed and divided. An enormous propaganda attack was to be made immediately upon Collins and papers were already in preparation to be sent to the gutter press in England. A plan had been made in the House of Commons to circulate the story. It would be made known that Collins had a son and that Moya was the mother. It would then be necessary to force Crompton Llewellyn-Davis to divorce her and she would be an outcast in the London society where she had formerly been a princess. But above all, immediate arrangements had been made to unleash Tim Healy and his cohorts in Ireland against Collins, and, Lady Lavery said, 'to do what he did on Parnell before.' "[305]

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[305] *Ibid.,* p. 112. Tim Healy became an Irish Parliamentary Party MP in 1880. In the following years he became Parnell's secretary and was favoured by him in his political and legal careers. But in 1890, following Parnell being cited as co-respondent in Captain William O'Shea's divorce action against his wife Catherine, Healy opposed Parnell's continuing leadership of the IPP and became an outspoken and provocative critic of him. After Parnell's death in 1891, Healy was labelled 'the

Collins immediately knew all was lost. *"The reference to Parnell struck Collins like a thunderbolt. He knew immediately the importance and the danger of the British plan. With the whole British establishment against him on one side of the Irish Sea, and all the newspapers, and on the other side, Tim Healy and the bishops and all the forces of sanctimony that would be laid against him, together with those who would object to the political steps that he was now taking, on the republican side – the 'Sea Green Incorruptible', he realised in a second that he was lost and worse, Ireland was lost. Lloyd George was going to detonate the unity of the Republic, the Volunteers, the IRB, and Sinn Féin, with this one bombshell! All would be confusion, anger, division, recrimination. History would record for a hundred years that Michael Collins had thrown away Ireland's chance of freedom for a woman's body! He was unable to think clearly."*[306]

After a while, Collins realised what he had to do. He would sign the Treaty and afterwards devote every resource at his disposal to freeing the North from Craig's and Lloyd George's clutches. But, as we saw earlier, Sinn Féin's 1918 General Election manifesto had warned, whether through the medium of foresight or coincidentally, that,

"The right of a sovereign nation to sovereign independence rests upon immutable natural law and cannot be made the subject of a compromise. Any attempt to barter away the sacred and inviolate rights of nationhood begins in dishonour and is bound to end in disaster".

How true that warning now turned out to be. Despite Collins' determination to do everything in his power to release the North from Unionist and British rule, and to unite the country, such colossal blunders as he had made are not easily remedied. As we will see in the following pages, Collins ultimately paid with his life; and the nationalist people of the North, as well as those in the south of the country, were destined to pay a devastating price, many with their lives, for several decades to come.

The Anglo Irish Treaty

The terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 signed by representatives of the British government and the Irish Republic, officially known as the 'Articles of Agreement for a Treaty Between Great Britain and Ireland', were:

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enemy within' by the different parties he aspired to belong to. He was a friend of William Martin Murphy (who would go on to be responsible for the Dublin Lockout in 1913). As a barrister he acted for Thomas Ashe's family and for internees in Frongoch Camp after the Easter Rising, and became interested in Sinn Féin. He was appointed the first Governor-General of the Irish Free State. He was also the uncle of Kevin O'Higgins who became Minister for Justice in the new Free State.

[306] *Ibid.,* p. 112-113.

- The Irish Free State to be established within 1 year, as a self-governing Dominion, within the community of nations known as the British Empire;
- That status would be the same as the Dominions of Canada, Australia, Newfoundland, New Zealand and the Union of South Africa;
- The King would be Head of State of the Irish Free State and would be represented in Ireland by a Governor-General;
- Members of the new Free State parliament would be required to take an Oath of Allegiance to the Free State and, "to be faithful to" the King, his heirs and successors, "in virtue of the common citizenship";
- British forces to withdraw from most of Ireland;
- The North to have an option to opt out of the Free State, within one month of the Treaty coming into effect, and remain as Northern Ireland (as created by the Government of Ireland Act 1920);
- In the event of Northern Ireland opting out of the Free State, a Boundary Commission would draw up a border line between the Free State and Northern Ireland;
- Britain, for its own security, would continue to control a limited number of deep water ports in the Free State;
- The Irish Free State would be responsible for a proportionate part of the United Kingdom's debt, dated at the time of signing the Treaty;
- The Treaty would have a superior status in Irish law over any new Constitution of the Irish Free State.

In the days and weeks that followed, there were discussions, debates and arguments along with recriminations and bitterness. The speeches and actions within the Dáil, the government, the IRB, the IRA and Sinn Féin confirmed how widespread the divisions were, and how numerous the splits were. The Dáil approved the Treaty by 64 votes to 57, causing De Valera to resign and walk out, followed by his supporters. The remaining Dáil Deputies elected Arthur Griffith as President, Michael Collins as Minister for Finance, Richard Mulcahy as Minister for Defence, along with William Cosgrave, Gavan Duffy and Kevin O'Higgins in other ministerial roles.

A new government was elected on January 14, 1922, establishing the interim government set out in the Treaty to establish the constitutional measures set out therein. Collins became Chairman of this Provisional government, with pro-Treaty Deputies allocated cabinet roles. MacDowell points out,

"[t]here was a dubious air about these proceedings and by no democratic criteria can the Free State Provisional government be said to have been legally elected. But it had de facto office, and the political, military and financial support of the British".[307] This government proceeded to take over from the British all buildings and assets formerly in the latter's control and ownership, including the buildings within Dublin Castle. It also proceeded to take steps to implement other articles of the Treaty, not without difficulty.

IRA factions, pro- and anti-Treaty, competed to take over control of former British barracks. Sinn Féin postponed a vote on the Treaty until after the General Election, to be held in June, hoping for a reconciliation between Collins and De Valera.

Despite efforts to keep unity within the IRA, *"there were influences at work, dedicated to increasing tension and bitterness to extremes",* with the result that the IRA was taken over by Rory O'Connor, Liam Lynch and Ernie O'Malley, and disobeyed orders from the cabinet. The Executive essentially set up an alternative government and took over the Four Courts as their headquarters.

Next, De Valera set up a new political party, composed of anti-Treaty members of the Second Dáil. But De Valera held no sway with the IRA. *"The entire republican leadership was to be liquidated and the country to endure a fratricidal Civil War before De Valera achieved any political recognition, and that over the bones of the Republican Movement which he was, in turn, to persecute to the most malignant of his ability."*[308]

A fresh attempt was made for both sides to reach a settlement, with five on the pro-Treaty side (Seán Hales, Seamus O'Dwyer, Sean MacEoin, Joseph McGuinness and Patrick O'Maille), with five on the anti-Treaty side (Harry Boland, Liam Mellows, Tom Clarke, Sean Moylan and PJ Ruttledge). According to MacDowell,

"Collins and De Valera were urged to consult together, and for three tense days they battled out in colourful polemic. On 20 May, 1922, the Collins/De Valera pact saw the light of day. It infuriated the British, the IRA, and the more extreme Free Staters, but for a short time it offered the hope that brothers in arms might yet be prevented from slaying each other".[309]

A General Election was held on 16 June, 1922, with Collins and the Pro-Treaty faction being returned with 58 Deputies, as opposed to 35 Anti-Treaty, 4 Unionists, 7 Farmers party, 7

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[307] *Ibid.,* p. 199.
[308] *Ibid.,* p. 121.
[309] *Ibid.,* p. 122. The document contained a way forward for joint governance of the country, reflecting the differences that existed, and including representatives of the IRA GHQ.

Independents and 17 Labour. It was possible that this outcome, if it had been allowed to stand, would have secured peace with the creation of a coalition government.

Additional British Threats

However, Britain once more usurped and destroyed the possibility of peace in Ireland. Threats were made to Free State cabinet members that Britain would attack Dublin and take over the country again, because Britain would not tolerate a coalition with anti-Treaty Deputies, claiming this would be a breach of the Treaty. MacDowell argues that British State Papers, released in London in 1993, showed that:

"[d]etailed plans had been drawn up to occupy certain towns, to expel the inhabitants and to relocate the loyalist population there in protected centres. These loyalists would be armed and would carry out the expulsions of the existing inhabitants, an early example of what is now known as 'ethnic cleansing'. The rest of the country would then become a Free-Fire-Zone under Martial Law".[310]

It is clear from this that the British government in 1922 was prepared to 'plant' loyalists/unionists/Protestants in Irish nationalist areas in order to secure British power and authority over the resulting displaced populations and disputed territories.

Sir Henry Wilson Shot

Towards the end of June 1922, Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson was shot and killed in London, a killing carried out by two IRB members based there, Dunne and O'Sullivan. Wilson was not only a member of the Westminster parliament but was also chief advisor to the unionists and one-time Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He was also the instigator of campaigns by unionists to burn Catholics and nationalists out of their homes in the North. To say the least, his assassination was an important event, which had been ordered, months earlier, by Michael Collins as a reprisal for pogroms against Catholics in the North. Wilson's death stopped the pogroms, but unleashed fury in Westminster and the Free State.

Four Courts Attacked

Lloyd George warned Collins that unless he took action against the IRA in the Four Courts, he (Lloyd George) would do so. A few days later, with British government support and artillery, the Free State Army attacked the Four Courts. Collins did not agree with that course of action – he would have preferred a surrender – but he was over-ruled. However,

[310] *Ibid.,* p. 123. One thing arguable with MacDowell's analysis is that similar 'ethnic cleansing' had been carried out by the British in Ireland for centuries.

Andy Cope, a British official based in Ireland to oversee the peaceful and efficient handing over of power, but secretly the undercover head of British intelligence in the country, *"controlled all agents directly, including Dalton,*[311] *and insisted on an early attack. He was determined that the Free State Army and the IRA should be brought into armed conflict".*[312]

Blaming the IRA for killing Wilson (although it had nothing to do with it), Lloyd George and Churchill knew that the only way they could stay in government in Westminster was to appease Conservative MPs who were hell-bent on revenge. Meanwhile, the republicans in Ireland were intent on commandeering 16 cars to send to the North with Peadar O'Donnell, to intensify the guerrilla war there. This led to arrests and captures on both sides. The Provisional government used this activity as an example of the insurgents preventing society's return to normal life, and as an excuse to attack the Four Courts, which they did on 30 June, 1922.[313] Free State troops surrounded the building and issued an ultimatum to surrender, by a specific time, to those inside. The soldiers inside agreed to surrender, but at a slightly later time. However, at the specified time the Provisional Army opened fire and, in doing so, officially started the Irish Civil War.

The Civil War

A few IRA leaders, such as Ernie O'Malley and Liam Lynch, escaped and headed south to attempt to organise the IRA there. Others, including Rory O'Connor, Liam Mellows and Joe McKelvey were taken prisoner. All those men were on the Supreme Council of the IRB, which was now as divided as many other Irish political and military bodies.

So too was the Free State cabinet, with some, such as Griffith, suspecting Collins' hand in the assassination of Wilson. Collins, for his part, was determined to keep control of an increasingly vulnerable political and military situation, with the most important task being the elimination of the IRA threat to his plans for using the Treaty as a stepping-stone to real independence. But many in the Provisional government, such as O'Higgins, Cosgrave and MacNeill, did not share his vision and were happy to let Ireland take its place in the British Commonwealth. They were being advised by Tim Healy, who had also acted as

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[311] Emmet Dalton was the OC (Officer Commanding) the Free State troops in Cork.

[312] *Ibid.,* p. 126. In an interview given many years later, Cope described the violence of those years as *"the most discreditable of your country's history".* (Source: *https://www.theirishstory.com/2021/05/19.*) After all, it had been England's defence of its colonisation of Ireland for hundreds of years that the Irish were too barbaric to govern themselves and needed England's provision of civilisation. It was in Britain's interest to keep up this false argument to justify further intervention, as they did in the North for decades during the Troubles that followed.

[313] This was one day before the Dáil was to have met, in order to officially to hand over power to the Provisional government, with the new parliament meeting on 1 July, 1923.

adviser to the Irish during the Treaty negotiations, and who became the first Governor-General of the new Free State, no doubt in return for services rendered to Britain and thereby, according to MacDowell, *"crowning a life of treachery and deceit"*.[314]

The Provisional government itself was operating with only *de facto* power, albeit with British financial and military support, but it had no legal basis, as the existing Second Dáil had not met on the day it was supposed to, *viz* July 1, 1922, to finalise to it the transition of power. Nevertheless, the new cabinet met on 12 July to remove Collins from chairmanship of the Provisional government and appointed William Cosgrave in his place, thereby consolidating the pro-British power block in cabinet. But Collins' demotion was kept secret, as it was felt that the public would not have tolerated moves made against him.

Collins remained Commander-in-Chief of the Free State Army and he then gave that role his total attention. His immediate intention was to end the Civil War and mend the splits in all organisations. First, he had to defeat the IRA militarily, and having done so, win them over to his thinking with generous peace terms. He convinced himself this could be done within a month; but he had underestimated the perfidy of the British; the ongoing intense rivalry to usurp his own power within the Provisional parliament; as well as the pressure being applied by Churchill on the British Secret Service in Ireland, through Andy Cope, to take revenge for Bloody Sunday, an event that still smarted profoundly.

In the following month, the fighting between former comrades continued throughout the country. The republicans, led by Liam Lynch, took control of almost all of Munster in the south. Collins' troops occupied most other places. He planned to oust the republicans by sending troops by sea to Fenit in Kerry, and Passage East in Waterford. Within a few days, Cork had fallen without a fight and republicans in Kerry took to the hills, in a vain effort to restart the guerrilla tactics which had previously been effective, but were no more.

Collins put out peace feelers, which led to a meeting between himself, as Commander-in-Chief of the Free State Army, and senior officers of the Northern Divisions of the IRA. Having recently procured weapons for another Northern unit, Collins was determined to reach a peace agreement. Speaking in his role as Dáil Deputy for South Armagh, he assured the meeting he would do everything in his power within the Free State government to deny recognition to a unionist government in the North; that the IRA in the North would be aided by the government in the Free State, through IRB links; and that

[314] *Ibid.,* p. 129.

within two years the Boundary Commission would be forced to realise that only 2-and-a-half counties out of the six in the North could be considered suitable for being ruled by unionists, thereby undermining the ability of the newly established Northern Ireland to govern at all.

Collins repeated his belief that the Civil War in the south would be over in a few weeks, and that all republican prisoners would be dealt with fairly, with most released by Christmas. All prisoners from the Four Courts battle would be well treated and, on release, be given a choice as to their future military and/or political careers. Most of those present were IRB members from the North. They trusted Collins and agreed with his proposals.

But not everyone was happy with what Collins was proposing. When Churchill found out, within a matter of days, he decided that Collins must be taught a bitter lesson. Within a week, instructions were sent to Dalton from Lloyd George which, when carried out, would seal Michael Collins' fate. Politically, O'Higgins and Blythe in the Free State government were informed that Britain would re-invade Dublin and impose Martial Law throughout Ireland if Collins was not removed from government. They were also warned that the Westminster government would consider it an act of war against Britain if the Free State made peace, or even attempted to make peace, with the IRA.

By mid-1922, both Arthur Griffith and Harry Boland, long-time friends and comrades of Collins, were dead. As far as he was concerned, Collins had achieved his objective of bringing the Civil War fighting to an end within a month, with no towns now being held by the anti-Treaty forces. He decided to go ahead with the next phase of his plan, to seek peace. He sent messages, through IRB connections to leading republicans, Liam Lynch, Tom Hales and Tom Barry, that any of them who wanted to join the National Army at officer level, could do so. Similarly, any republican soldiers wishing to go home could do so. Additionally, any IRA members who wished to continue the fight in the North would be given arms and transport to so do.

But once again, the British were one step ahead of Collins and knew of his plans. They conspired with Tim Healy, Andy Cope and Kevin O'Higgins to make sure Collins would not succeed. They threatened what passed for the Free State government that they would revoke the Treaty and occupy Dublin unless the war continued. The threat succeeded. Kevin O'Higgins, Eoin MacNeill and Earnest Blythe made the decision that Michael Collins had to die for the good of the country.

Andy Cope started to make the arrangements with Emmet Dalton. Together they chose two trusted ex-British soldiers, now serving in the Provisional Army, to carry out the shooting. One of these proved unreliable, so in the end MB Corry carried out the task alone. Dalton declined to get involved, having become friendly with Collins and fearful of the inevitable angry backlash in the country. Cope assured him that the killing would take place in an ambush situation and the IRA would be blamed. Realising that by now he was compromised by even knowing about the planned assassination, but also by being in receipt of other British state secrets, Dalton felt he had no option but to agree to help.

The following week, Collins had arranged to travel to west Cork, seeking to carry out his peace plans. He had set up a meeting with Florrie O'Donoghue, Cork Head Centre of the IRB, and other IRB members who were republican officers. The IRA were holding a conference nearby, where Liam Lynch, Eamonn De Valera and Erskine Childers would be in attendance. It had been arranged that neutral IRB members would act as go-betweens and mediators between the two sides, seeking to facilitate a peace settlement.

Mulcahy, Chief of Staff of the National Army, had received intercepted messages and knew of this plan. He passed the details to O'Higgins, who realised that if Collins achieved peace, the Provisional Free State parliament would have to meet (a situation which, up until then, he and his pro-British colleagues had prevented); the Collins/De Valera pact would come into operation; there would be a coalition cabinet of Cumann na nGaedheal and Sinn Féin; Collins would probably become President of the Executive Council; and the IRB would be back in control.

Afraid for his own career, O'Higgins contacted Cope, who expedited his own plans for Collins' demise in Cork, having made sure that a different, unauthorised and botched attempt to kill Collins in Dublin had been neutralised.

On 20 August, 1922, Collins left Dublin for Cork, in a convoy consisting of a different car from usual, and two different drivers from usual, one of whom was Corry, who had served in the British army in the Middle East, and had been a hit man for MI6, until he had been encouraged to join the Provisional Army in Ireland, allowing him to serve Britain's interests in Ireland after the country's official retreat.

The following day, Collins held talks with Emmet Dalton to make plans for an inspection in the western part of the county. They left Cork city early the next morning, passing through Béal na Bláth in west Cork and on to Macroom. In Béal na Bláth, the 2nd West Cork Brigade was holding a conference; while another conference of major republicans

was also taking place nearby, which included Liam Lynch, General Tom Hayes and officers of the 1st Southern Division. De Valera and Erskine Childers were also there. An agreement had been reached to listen to Collins' proposals.

A lack of communication between the makers of that decision, and the Brigade staff members who had also been meeting, led to an ambush being prepared for Collin's convoy, which had been spotted, making its way through Béal na Bláth towards Bandon, on the morning of 22 August, 1922 and, it was thought, would likely be returning that way later that same day.

At dusk that evening, with the ambush in place, Collins' party did indeed return from Bandon on their way to Cork city, via Béal na Bláth. MacDowell tells his version of what happened in this way:

"As Lieutenant Smith, on the motorcycle, turned the corner opposite the public house to Béal na Bláth, he noticed a cart drawn across the road, and two men scurrying backwards from it. At that moment a shot rang out from the lookout post down the hill. Smith quickly wheeled his motorcycle into the ditch. The Crossley tender stopped twenty or thirty yards behind on the bend in the road. Hearing the shot, Dalton shouted to the driver to stop. Collins looked at him in surprise. The driver pulled into the side of the road and they all jumped out. The armoured car stopped about 30 yards behind Collins' car. Collins drew his Mauser pistol and went forward. He threw himself behind the ditch and started firing towards the crest of the hill from whence flashes of gunfire were visible. There were five IRA men on the brow of the hill and rifle fire from them began to patter on the road and against the turret of the armoured car. The machine gun on the armoured car began to fire back at them in reply. Dalton took up a position kneeling behind the bonnet of the touring Leyland car and started firing with his rifle. At this stage the driver, Corry, had taken up a position about six feet from Collins on his right-hand side and was firing from his own rifle. As he passed Dalton, he had taken Dalton's Mauser from its holster and jammed [it] into his own pocket. Dalton paid no attention, gazing stonily ahead . . . for a moment, at the focal point of the ambush, there was only three men, Collins, Dalton and Corry".

Collins, seeing the republicans retreating, shouted for a rifle. *"At that moment, it was clear to Corry that his gun was empty and that for a few seconds he was unarmed. Corry was holding his rifle loosely in his left hand; in his right hand was Dalton's Mauser pistol pointing at Collins' head from a distance of about three feet. For a fraction of a second there was amazed incomprehension and anger on Collins' face and then he roared, 'You bastard', just as Corry's pistol fired. The single crack of the Mauser was lost in the general confusion of the battle. Corry tossed*

the pistol on the roadside edge, and throwing his rifle into the firing position, he began to fire, working the bolt furiously".[315]

Collins Shot

Collins, fatally wounded, was discovered by the shocked Commandant O'Connell, who held his hand and made an Act of Contrition into his ear, just before Collins' loosening grasp confirmed that he was dead.

There was a small bullet hole in Collins' temple, and a large gaping exit wound at the back. His cap, lying nearby, displayed a small hole on the front right-hand side of the band. The cap ended up in the possession of General Seán Hales, who was Officer Commanding of the Free State soldiers in Bandon. Hales, his suspicion aroused, sent the cap to GHQ in Dublin, where it disappeared. But Hales continued to ask questions. This was to lead to Dalton's resignation from the Army and Hales' own death.

Collins' empty Mauser, and that of his assailant, were found on the roadside early the following morning by a local man. The second pistol still had four bullets in the magazine. It bore the initials ED. When this news became known, Free State soldiers arrived at the man's house, demanding that he hand over the guns, which were never seen again.

Other cover-ups were quickly put in place, such as an order (from Dalton) that no inquests were to take place in Cork. Collins' body was transferred to Dublin by sea, so avoiding the many towns and villages where, no doubt, the people of Ireland would have turned out in their thousands to show their respect for, and love of, Collins.

In Dublin, Collins' body was embalmed. Records of the embalmer – withheld for forty years – mentioned him filling a small hole in Collins' forehead with a waxy substance and bandaging the massive exit wound. Thousands lined up to pay their respects as his body lay in State in the City Hall, and almost 300,000 people lined the streets for his funeral procession to Glasnevin Cemetery. In Kilmainham Gaol, almost a thousand republican prisoners knelt down to recite the Rosary for the repose of his soul, witnessed by Tom Barry, who wrote, *"I have yet to learn of a better tribute to the part played by any man in the struggle with the English for Irish independence".*[316]

[315] *Ibid.,* pp. 144-145.
[316] *Ibid.,* p. 146.

And so ended the life of another of Ireland's greatest heroes; and so, also, ended his hopes and plans to rid the North of British/Unionist rule. That campaign would be side-lined for many more decades to come.

Execution of Republican Prisoners by the Free State

Meanwhile, the Free State forces overpowered those of the IRA in the continuing Civil War, which was marked by ever-increasing vicious acts of reprisals on both sides. Military Tribunals were set up by the Free State government, under Public Safety legislation, authorising the imposition of life sentences and executions on those found guilty of aiding and abetting attacks on State forces; for possession of ammunition or explosives without proper authority; and for looting and arson. From November 1922, republican prisoners began to be executed, including Erskine Childers, who had acted as secretary to the Irish side in the Treaty negotiations. In all, 12,000 republicans were taken prisoner and 81 were officially executed. In addition, unauthorised executions by the Free State Army numbered over 150. In the republican stronghold of Kerry, Free State forces tied together nine captured republicans with rope and secured them to a landmine at Ballyseedy Cross near Tralee, which they then detonated. One man, Stephen Fuller, lived to tell the tale of the brutal act, which still resonates and causes pain and divisions to this day.

Republican Reprisals

Reprisals by republicans included the killing of TD Seán Hales and family members of Kevin O'Higgins and WT Cosgrave. But the republicans were fighting a losing War. The National Army was making headway into their defences, while their own guerrilla tactics, once so effective against the British, were now mostly ineffective. As well as the majority of the population now supporting the Free State, republicans had the Catholic Church against them and they were refused the sacraments. Catholic bishops issued a statement decrying their campaign of killing members of the National Army, claiming it had no moral sanction and was, therefore, *"murder before God".*

The government-authorised imprisonment and execution of republicans, including thirty-four who were assassinated in January 1923, badly affected the morale of the remaining IRA members. More executions took place in the field in the following two months, including that of four IRA men who had been sent to County Donegal as part of Collins' planned offensive to help free the North. Charles Daly, Daniel Enright, Seán Larkin and Timothy O'Sullivan had been captured in Creeslough and were executed some months later in Drumboe Woods, Stranorlar.

A meeting of the IRA on 26 March, 1923, there was a narrow majority vote in favour of continuing the fight. Soon afterwards, IRA Chief of Staff, Liam Lynch, was captured and executed. Other leaders, including Dan Breen, were also taken prisoner. On 24 May, 1923, Frank Aiken, the IRA's new Chief of Staff, issued an order to cease military activities and dump (rather than surrender) arms.

End of the Civil War

While under normal Rules of War, prisoners of war should have been freed when war ended, the Free State government introduced new emergency legislation in August 1923, determined to make legal the continued imprisonment of over 13,000 republican prisoners arrested during the war, as well as the thousands more arrested after the war had ended. In October 1923, 8,000 republican prisoners embarked on a hunger strike which lasted for around 40 days, having achieved nothing. The Civil War had claimed around 2,000 military and 1,000 civilian deaths. In addition, the burning and destruction of government-owned property, including railways and roads, has been estimated at many millions of pounds, putting the new government in a very weak financial position.

As a result of the economic cost to the Free State of having waged the Civil War, Ireland ended up with a financial deficit of £50,000,000 in today's terms. Many roads, railways, public buildings and businesses had been badly damaged or destroyed. This situation led to other, unforeseen, consequences. When the Boundary Commission negotiations took place, in 1924-25, the Free State government was forced to ask for debt forgiveness for the Imperial Debt owed as specified in the Treaty. This was granted by Britain in return for the Free State conceding the existing boundary separating the six counties of Tyrone, Fermanagh, Derry, Antrim, Down and Armagh from the rest of Ireland. This was another victory for Britain, which would probably not have occurred but for the Civil War, which the British secretly engineered and demanded should take place. The six counties of Northern Ireland were thereafter well and truly imbedded in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

On 27 August, 1923, another General Election was called in the Free State, which resulted in WT Cosgrave's party Cumann na nGaedheal winning, and staying in power until 1932.

In 1926, De Valera and Frank Aiken founded *Fianna Fáil*, which would go on to become the biggest party in the Free State. Sinn Féin lost membership, support, and importance in the after-war years. The IRA no longer supported it and instead rallied behind Fianna

Fáil, whose TDs swore the Oath of Allegiance and entered the Dáil in 1927. In 1935, when Fianna Fáil was elected into government, it banned the IRA.

The Statute of Westminster 1931

In the late 1920s, two conferences were called by the British, at the request of several of its Dominions, including Ireland, to set out, discuss and clarify the constitutional and legislative powers of those political institutions *vis à vis* the British Commonwealth. Much debate surrounded whether the Anglo-Irish Treaty (which title the British refused to acknowledge, and instead insisted on the title 'Articles of Agreement') had a superior status in law to the 1922 Free State Constitution. Those discussions were the basis for the Statute of Westminster passed by the British parliament in 1931, wherein Britain relinquished its right to legislate for any of the Dominions, unless specifically requested to do so.

Consequently, when elected to power in 1932, on the promise to the Irish electorate that it would establish an Irish Republic, Fianna Fáil abolished the Oath of Allegiance to the British monarch, removed power from the Governor-General (the British King's representative in Ireland) and abolished the Senate (which consisted mainly of unionists and pro-Treaty nationalists).

1937 Constitution

In 1937 a new Constitution was approved by referendum, whereby the head of State would be an elected President, no reference was made to allegiance to the British King and a territorial claim to Northern Ireland was included. The name of the country would no longer be the 'Irish Free State', but simply 'Ireland', or in the Irish language, *'Éire'*.

Britain raised no objections to these developments and in 1938 returned to Ireland complete control of the seaports which it had retained under the Treaty. Although the 1937 Constitution did not mention neutrality, Ireland demonstrated its independence from the United Kingdom during the Second World War by declaring its neutrality, albeit with some covert assistance to Britain when it was felt necessary.

Ireland Becomes A Republic

Under the Republic of Ireland Act 1948, which came into effect In April 1949, Ireland declared itself to be a Republic and no longer a member of the British Commonwealth. The British parliament then passed the Ireland Act 1949. Under that legislation Britain acknowledged that *Éire* (as Ireland was referred to under British law) had ceased to be a

member of the British Commonwealth and would in future be called The Republic of Ireland in all future (British) legislation. Northern Ireland would remain part of the United Kingdom. By the 1950s, most measures underpinning the Treaty and the Civil War no longer existed.

One of the arguments that Michael Collins had used, in his efforts to sell the Treaty to the politicians and people of Ireland, was that the Treaty might not have secured independence, but it provided a stepping-stone to achieving independence. It is doubtful that he could have had early knowledge of such a move as the passing of the Westminster Statute of 1931, but his prophetic words did come to pass – except, that is, in the North. The British were determined to keep the North at all costs. The following chapter will outline how that determination played out, and the continuing, horrific suffering it caused to the nationalist people of Ireland for many decades to come.

Chapter Eight

Bobby Sands (1954-1981)

THIS FINAL CHAPTER further explores the resistance of Irish people to Britain's/England's occupation and control of their country. It focuses on the period known as the Troubles, from the time of the establishment of Northern Ireland in 1920 up to the present day, including the settlement brokered in April 1998, between the governments of Ireland and the United Kingdom and most of the political parties in the six counties of Northern Ireland.

The Good Friday Agreement

The Good Friday Agreement provided for devolved government in the North, based on power sharing between the political parties in proportion to the percentage of votes cast for them; the decommissioning of paramilitary organisations; the early release of political prisoners; the removal of hard Border crossings; parity of esteem and police reform. Constitutionally, it was agreed that Northern Ireland would remain within the United Kingdom unless and until such time as the people of Ireland voted otherwise, on both sides of the Border. The Agreement was approved by the people of the North and the people of the Republic, the latter agreeing to remove Articles 2 and 3 from the Irish Constitution, thereby surrendering Ireland's constitutional claim to the whole of the land of Ireland – again, unless and until the people of Ireland voted otherwise, i.e. to unite Ireland. The Government of Ireland Act, 1920, was repealed. Most importantly, a mechanism for the calling of a Border poll on uniting both parts of Ireland has now been put in place. The prospect of the people of Ireland voting for a United Ireland is now a real possibility and can only be a matter of time.

The Agreement has faced several serious hurdles over the years, including suspensions of the Northern Ireland parliament at Stormont, followed by direct rule from Westminster, as well as trade complexities arising from Britain's decision to leave the European Union.

In June 2024, after a two-year collapse forced by the Democratic Unionist Party, the Assembly at Stormont is again up and running. Following elections in 2022, Sinn Féin became the party with the highest number of elected Assembly members. Accordingly, Sinn Féin's northern party leader, Michelle O'Neill,[317] has been nominated and approved as the First Minister of the Northern Ireland Assembly – the first time that position had gone to a nationalist party.

Throughout the years, from partition in 1920 up to this historic point in 2024, there has been such a plethora of outstanding bravery, self-sacrifice and heroism shown by so many of Ireland's sons and daughters in the ongoing struggle for freedom from Britain, that it is difficult to single out one person who might best symbolise the continuing spirit of resistance of the Irish nation during that period. In choosing Bobby Sands, a young, working-class, Catholic IRA volunteer, born and reared in Belfast, I do so for three reasons:

- the first is that although the six counties of Northern Ireland, during that time, were partitioned from the rest of Ireland – politically, geographically, economically and culturally – the nationalist and Catholic people of those six counties remained an integral part of the Irish nation, despite them often feeling, justifiably, that they had been abandoned by their Irish neighbours south of the Border. Although born and reared in British-occupied Northern Ireland, Bobby Sands was, without doubt, a true Irishman;[318]
- secondly, by his struggle as a Provisional IRA volunteer to resist British rule and free his country; by his imprisonment and involvement in the 'blanket protest' and the 'dirty protest' in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh; by his election as a Westminster MP for Fermanagh-South Tyrone constituency whilst on hunger strike and by his ultimate death from hunger strike, Bobby Sands became known world-wide, and his bravery did much to expose to the world the brutal and callous policies of then British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, towards Irish prisoners; and

[317] Those aware of the history of Ireland up to that point would have noticed the significance of having an O'Neill back in a foremost leadership role in Ulster.

[318] Articles 2 and 3 of Ireland's 1937 Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, continued to lay claim to the territory of the whole island of Ireland, until these Article were repealed, by referendum consent, when the population in the south of the country voted overwhelmingly in favour of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.

- thirdly, because the blanket protests and hunger strikes of Bobby Sands and his imprisoned comrades, male and female, marked a watershed for all sides in the conflict in the North and led, eventually, to the Peace Process that culminated in the Good Friday Agreement.

Northern Ireland after the Treaty

The Civil War in the Free State ended in March 1923. It was a vicious, and often dishonourable beginning for the new leaders, and government, with their abandonment of democratic decision-making and institutions in the blatant pursuit of political power and control. There were vengeful killings on both sides, by those for and against the Treaty, leaving bitter memories and resentments which have lasted up to modern times. And always in the hidden background, the chaos, hostility and deaths were being deliberately encouraged, and even demanded, by Britain.

The Civil War was not waged in the North. Michael Collins and the newly created Northern Ireland (NI) Prime Minister, Sir James Craig, had signed an agreement to end the fighting there on 30 March, 1922 – although Collins secretly supplied arms to the Northern IRA until shortly before his death some five months later. Aware of Collins' intentions to liberate the North, and acting on his advice, many northern IRA volunteers supported him, and thereby the Free State, with over 500 joining the National Army during the Civil War.

On 6 December, 1921, the Irish negotiators had formally signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, fully anticipating that the north of the country would secede from its provisions. Two days later, that is exactly what happened. Northern Ireland retained its constitutional status as set out in the Government of Ireland Act, 1920.

A Boundary Commission, consisting of a nominated representative from the UK, the Free State and Northern Ireland, was set up to discuss amendments to the provisional Border set out in the 1920 Act. As most of the northern counties now bordering the Free State had a majority of nationalists in their population, they, and people in the south of Ireland, were hopeful that there would be a transfer of land to the Free State (thereby rendering Northern Ireland too small to survive economically). However, hopes were dashed when it was learned that the Commission intended to recommend land transfers in both directions. In the end the Report, delayed until December 1925, recommended that no changes be made. Subsequently, the existing provisional Border was confirmed and

ratified by all three parliaments, a decision heavily influenced by the need for a resolution of financial affairs between Britain and the Free State.

However, partition led to more violence, involving 500 deaths and 10,000 refugees fleeing the North, according to historian Robert Lynch.[319] And it is not difficult to realise that partition lay at the root of the Troubles that followed. The debate surrounding the possibility of unifying Ireland again is currently in its early stages and a mechanism in law to bring unification about has already been established (under the Good Friday Agreement). However, enthusiasm – mainly within the electorate in the south, and among nationalists in the North – does not seem to be shared by the politicians of some of the main parties in the Republic, who appear strangely opposed to the idea, and equally strangely reluctant to 'upset unionists' with such talk. Nevertheless, with electoral support for Sinn Féin on both sides of the Border equalling or surpassing that of other political parties, it must surely not be long before a referendum on that issue is called. Sinn Féin is correct in saying that the concept of a United Ireland should be discussed and debated now, and the call for it to be so done, as a first step, in a Citizens' Assembly, where all sides and all opinions can be vented and thoroughly investigated, is a sensible one.

Is it that the old southern political parties are being disingenuous, and are they hesitant about even debating the concept of a United Ireland because they realise that they are facing an existential crisis? The predecessors of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael fought a civil war against each other, with disastrous consequences. Can they not move beyond those positions, one hundred years on, and accept that what is needed now is not just more of the current status quo (i.e. the 'peace' which has occurred over twenty-five years ago as a result of the Good Friday Agreement), but rather decisions and actions that will restore Ireland to her rightful statehood: a united, independent Republic?

It is not possible, in this book, to explore the problems that the post-partition Free State and, later, the Irish Republic, experienced in the formative years of its existence; nor the effect of harsh pro-British and pro-Catholic Church policies that succeeding Irish governments followed. Suffice it to say that they were many and cruel, and that they created a painful legacy which the citizens of today's society are still uncovering and, indeed, suffering from.

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[319] R Lynch, *The Partition of Ireland: 1918-1925*.

This Chapter confines itself to the years following the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the subsequent Irish Civil War, when the six counties of the north of Ireland effectively became a 'unionist state for a unionist people', constitutionally integrated within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. This was the outcome that Britain wanted, and for which it was prepared to relinquish control of the rest of Ireland. It seemed a good prospect, given that the North was more economically advanced, richer in industry and commerce and far less troublesome than the rest of Ireland. And with the North remaining a fundamental part of the United Kingdom, Britain could use it as an outpost from which to defend the island of Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) from foreign naval attack and invasion, especially as the use of the deep water 'Treaty ports' of Berehaven, Spike Island and Lough Swilly had been retained by Britain under the terms of the Treaty. Furthermore, unlike the rest of Ireland, the North was mainly unionist and Protestant, and therefore loyal to the Crown. The majority of the people could be relied on not to stage uprisings and not to seek unification with the south of the country. Theirs was to become the first 'country' within the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to be granted devolution, something which the authentic countries of Scotland and Wales were not granted for decades yet to come. They would have their own elected parliament at Stormont and would also have elected Members of the Westminster Parliament. However, although many powers were devolved (such as housing, education and policing), Northern Ireland did not have economic independence, and had to rely on the Westminster government for subsidies. In addition, Britain retained control of the armed forces, matters relating to the Crown, foreign powers, trade, war and peace, navigation and coinage.

Partition did not bring peace to Northern Ireland: in fact the opposite is the case. The systemic inequalities propping up the new unionist 'state' ensured that nationalists would become second class citizens, suffering depravation, poverty and hardship, a situation which would eventually boil over into what we now call the Troubles. This Chapter explores the events that led to the North's nationalist people engaging in peaceful protest marches in defence of their right to fair and equal treatment in housing allocation, employment opportunities and voting rights. It also reveals the Northern Ireland and British response to those peaceful civil rights campaigns, which eventually culminated in all-out war between the newly re-established Irish Republican Army and the British Army, supported by loyalist paramilitaries – a war that spilled over into both the Irish Republic and the British mainland.

Northern Ireland General Election 1921

The results of the Northern Ireland General Election in May 1921 demonstrate just how unionist the North was at that time. This was the first ever General Election conducted there for the election of members for its newly created Assembly, as well as for its own Prime Minister and government, under the terms of the Government of Ireland Act 1920. With 88% of the electorate voting, the Ulster Unionist Party won 40 of the 52 available Assembly seats (more than 77% of seats) and a two-thirds majority of all votes cast.

This result was a major shock to Sinn Féin who, being virtually certain of victory in the General Election held in the south of the country on the same day, had concentrated all of its efforts on the Northern election. It had campaigned hard on an anti-partition platform and expected to win a sizeable number of seats. However, they won only 6 seats, as did the Nationalist Party. Combined, the Nationalist Party and Sinn Féin won only 23% of the available seats. The political allegiance make-up of the northern electorate was now crystal clear.

Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland), 1922

The Northern Ireland government soon set out to make life difficult, even intolerable, for nationalists and Catholics who lived there. Catholics being forced out of existing jobs and not being hired for new ones; discriminatory housing policies in favour of Protestants; ingrained nationalist poverty and an underlying policy of forcing Catholics to emigrate all took their toll on the living conditions, and numerical size, of the nationalist population. On top of that came the Special Powers Act of 1922, which aimed *"to take steps for preserving the peace and maintaining order in Northern Ireland, and for purposes connected therewith"*. Also known as 'the Flogging Act' (since flogging was one of the penalties that could be imposed for its breach), the Act was originally introduced for only one year, but was renewed annually until 1928, then every 5 years until 1933 when nationalists took their seats, at which point it was made permanent.

In 1973, the Act was repealed, only to be replaced by the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act, 1973, passed by the Westminster parliament, as the Northern Ireland parliament had by then been suspended and replaced by direct rule from Westminster in March, 1972. Northern Ireland now found itself governed by the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. That situation was to remain, despite some failed attempts at power sharing, until the acceptance of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement by most political parties

in the North, the British and Irish governments and the electorate on both sides of the Border.

Bernadette Devlin, a young Catholic student who became involved in the Civil Rights Campaign in the North during the time that the Special Powers Act was in existence, wrote in 1969, that:

"On the rest of Britain, the existence of the Special Powers Act in Northern Ireland only has the effect of preventing the United Kingdom from signing international conventions on human rights. But in Northern Ireland it means you can be arrested without a warrant and imprisoned without charge, denied recourse to habeas corpus, legal advice or trial by jury; theoretically, you could be held incommunicado for years; it means that police can enter and search a house without a warrant, declare curfews, prohibit meetings, deny the right to hold an Inquest on someone who has died in custody. Among its many provisions is one blanket one, providing for the arrest of people who do anything 'calculated to be prejudicial to the preservation of peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland and not specifically provided for in the regulations'. So total is the power it gives the police and the Minister for Home Affairs that a leading member of the South African government has said he'd be prepared to swap all his repressive legislation for one Special Powers Act".[320]

The initial reason for the introduction of the Special Powers Act was not that peace and order were being undermined at the commencement of the rule of the new government of Northern Ireland in 1922, but rather that the said government, consisting entirely of Unionist members, was determined that its grip on society would not be undermined.

The fact that it was felt necessary that the Act should be extended annually until 1928, and then every 5 years until 1973, when it was finally repealed, suggests something was very much amiss in the artificial, unionist, satellite 'state' of Northern Ireland during the 50 years of the existence of both. The statistics surrounding the use of the Act bears out this supposition. For example, one of the most controversial powers of the Act was 'internment without trial'. That provision, used exclusively against the nationalist population, was responsible for 700 republicans being interned without trial from May 1922 to December 1924.[321]

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[320] B Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (London 1969), p. 113.
[321] LK Donohue, *Regulating Northern Ireland, The Special Powers Act 1922-1972*, The Historical Journal (1998), 41 (4).

The Start of the Troubles

Bernadette Devlin, a native of Cookstown, County Tyrone, gives a personal insight into the events that led to the Troubles. Adopting a class-based, rather than a religious- or politics-based analysis, she spells out the effects of partition on the north of Ireland:

"Some of the Protestants then decided that since the boundary had been drawn, such Catholics as remained in the north were on the wrong side of it, and should get out. The Catholics didn't want to go: down there in Éire, the Free State faction were still fighting it out, and they didn't want to get involved. So here began the persecution of the Catholic working class by the Protestant working class, aided and abetted by the Northern Ireland parliament as soon as it was set up in 1921. Catholics, particularly in Belfast, were warned not to come to work; when they did come they were thrown in the docks; Catholic homes were burned out. This immediately led to repercussions in the less Protestant counties – Fermanagh, Armagh and Tyrone – and right into the 1930s there was religious warfare in Northern Ireland".[322]

Although she does acknowledge sectarian animosity existed between Protestants and Catholics, especially during times of Protestant Orange Order marches and Catholic Feast Day celebrations, Devlin asserts that the real divisions stemmed from poverty and inequality, not religion. Indeed, she says discrimination based on religion was a ploy to keep the working class from uniting and fighting for better rights for all:

"Both the Protestant unionists and the Catholic nationalists deny they discriminate against each other, but both use religion to divide and rule the working class. It is only less serious on the Catholic side because there are fewer Catholic bosses and fewer Catholic local authorities in a position to practice discrimination. It is a tactic which has made the ruling minority look like a majority and kept the Unionist Party in power since Northern Ireland existed. Polarised by this ploy into their religious sects, and set against each other, the ordinary people have not been able to combine and fight politically for their real interests. At the bottom of the social pyramid, with nothing to lose, the Catholic working man doesn't really fear the Protestant; but the Protestant working man, who has very little, feels the need to hang on to his Protestant identity in case he loses what little he has. He fears the Catholic because he knows that any gain made by the Catholic minority will be his loss, for the businessmen and the landowners, Orange or Nationalist, are not going to suffer losses on anybody's behalf".[323]

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[322] B Devlin, *op. cit.*, p. 56.
[323] *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

However, she avoids discussing perhaps the ultimate source of discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland during those years, which was more likely to have had its roots in the Plantation of Ulster in the seventeenth century, and the creation then of a dominant Protestant society, reinforced by making outcasts of, and discriminating against, Catholics in the region, through a combination of land seizures, displacement, servitude and emigration.

Whatever about the original reasons, in the years leading up to the outbreak of civil rights protests in the North in 1969, the treatment of the Catholic population as second-class citizens had intensified in many ways, most notably in the allocation of voting rights, housing and employment. Society remained polarised along religious grounds, as had been the case since the Ulster Plantation. The physical aspects of society, such as civil spaces, were also polarised, with Catholics not free to enter, meet together or socialise in areas and places known to be Protestant-controlled. Catholic/nationalist rallies or commemorations, such as Easter Rising commemoration marches, were banned and it was an offence to wear an Easter Lily; while unionist ones, such as Orange Order parades and Twelfth of July marches, went ahead with no restrictions, with participants dressed in full regalia, often marching, piping, drumming and singing, loudly and provocatively, through Catholic areas.

Government Sanctioned Discrimination in Housing and Employment

Bigotry and discrimination had a solid foundation in the ethos of the northern state: Catholics were not wanted and were placed in a position where they would be better off leaving. Official discrimination was practised widely in the employment and housing policies of the NI governments during the 1960s.

Ronnie Monck, a sociologist based at the University of Ulster, Coleraine, investigated some of the perceptions of the people who participated in the outbreak of the Troubles in 1968, in an attempt to find out why this outbreak occurred e.g. was it connected to the partition of Ireland in 1920, or was it caused, as some maintained, by the manipulation of the civil rights movement by the IRA? He published some of his findings in 1992.[324]

One young victim of employment discrimination, typical of many of those interviewed, described his first job application:

[324] R Monck, *The Making of The Troubles in Northern Ireland*, Journal of Contemporary History (April, 1992), vol. 27, no. 2.

"I got an interview there one time for a job. It was in the warehouse, it wasn't even on the shop floor. And I'm sitting in the hall waiting to go in to the interview and this young lad passed me, he worked in the place, and he says to me, 'What's your name?' I said, 'Joseph McKinley', and he says, 'You've no chance of a job here.' 'What do you mean?' He says, 'What school do you go to?' 'Barnageeha, St Patrick's Barnageeha, Antrim Road.' He says, 'You're wasting your time.' . . . I would say that was my first ever snub for being Catholic. And I felt it like. Because I knew sitting in that interview that day, as soon as your man asked me what school I was from, there was no way I was going to get that job".[325]

Describing the personal experiences of Catholics looking for adequate housing, Monck's study confirms the existence of discrimination in housing too, where even the government's own statistics showed the situation as discriminatory.[326]

The study quotes one interviewee who recalled,

"More new houses were being built as a result of a very bad housing situation. These new houses were being built and let to people who just weren't the most deserving cases, at the behest, by and large, of local councillors. People were aware of discrimination. Certainly. When you go to look for a house, and particularly if you have three or four or five of a family, and in some cases more than that, and you couldn't get a house, and an unmarried girl, a single girl could get a house . . . people didn't need to be informed of the fact that there was discrimination being practised".[327]

Explaining the rationale behind such policies, as well as their consequences, Monck concludes that, *"Of course, for the Unionist government, the incentive was that non-householders could not vote, so housing Catholics was not good business. Many Catholics faced with discrimination when seeking work or a roof over their heads, chose to emigrate. Those who remained provided a fertile environment for a Civil Rights Campaign which called for 'houses on merit' and an end to job discrimination".*[328]

Monck outlines the situation in Derry, where two thirds of the population were anti-Unionist, but two thirds of Council members were Unionist, because of ward boundaries and gerrymandering:

"Housing problems were particularly acute in nationalist Derry . . . In the mid-1960s Derry was in a ferment of agitation, centred around housing rights and unemployment. As Finbar

[325] *Ibid.,* pp. 213-214.
[326] *Ibid.,* p. 213.
[327] *Ibid.,* p. 213.
[328] *Ibid.,* p. 213.

O'Docherty, a civil rights activist in Derry, tells it: 'It was more or less a breeding ground for a lot of people to come into politics. It was housing and jobs that led to civil rights' ".

He continues, *"In Derry, Catholics were not an embattled minority as in Belfast, nor were they so constrained by conservatism as in the country areas. Add to this a radical republican and labour movement, and a potentially explosive mix was evident".*[329]

The Civil Rights Movement

Regarding the emergence of the Civil Rights Campaign in Northern Ireland in the 1960s, Monck states that Conn and Patricia McCluskey from Dungannon established the first civil rights organisation in Northern Ireland in 1964 (the Campaign for Social Justice). They were Catholic, but not nationalist; their movement was purely civil rights based. He identifies another strand of the civil rights movement, which came from the Republican Movement attempting to find a non-violent way forward after the failed Border Campaign of 1958-1962. Their Wolfe Tone Society formed a Civil Rights Society in 1966, consisting of Protestants and Catholics, which focused on the Special Powers Act as well as discrimination against Catholics.

In addition, Monck states that the Communist Party sought to educate republicans in non-violent means of activism and to campaign on the unity of working-class Protestants and Catholics. Another strand of civil rights activism was the People's Democracy (PD) which, according to Monck, *"within the civil rights movement and independently was to play a crucial, detonating role in the Troubles to come. Some of its leaders came from a Northern Ireland Labour Party background, but they were radicalised by Trotskyism and the whole May 1968 libertarian impetus".*[330]

Finally, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was set up in 1967. It started out by canvassing for the rights of individuals but became heavily influenced by events happening in the US, such as civil rights marches for justice and equality.

Monck argues that the complexity of the different groups, and the different aspirations represented in the civil rights movement, meant that the unity of NICRA began to fall apart when *"the violence started or when things began to go wrong"*, but insists that *"we can date precisely when Catholic resentment and civil rights organising was translated into*

[329] *Ibid.,* p. 214.
[330] *Ibid.,* p. 216.

demonstrations in the public arena. It was with the August 1968 civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon in County Tyrone".[331]

Civil Rights Marches

When the Revd Ian Paisley[332] and his Ulster Protestant Volunteers called for a counter-demonstration to the Coalisland to Dungannon march, the police barred the march from entering Dungannon town centre. This was the start of the counter-reform movement and a confirmation to Catholics that the discrimination they were experiencing was deliberate government policy.

Other marches were organised in towns around the North in late 1968, such as Derry, Belfast and Armagh, in an attempt to force the Stormont government to reform the wrongs evident in society. But the government refused to budge, provoking this response from one student:

"I realised that there was something wrong with the State and it had to be reformed . . . I started to take up the political line that at the end of the day you needed a socialist [government] . . . I wanted a united Ireland, a united socialist Ireland".[333]

This reasoning leads Monck to conclude, *"So, by failing to cope with a reformist movement, the State was creating revolutionaries".*[334]

At later marches, such as the one that took place from Belfast to Derry in January 1969, peaceful people, exercising a democratic right to demonstrate, were attacked at Burntollet Bridge, close to Derry, and assaulted by Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) men in protective clothing and shields, wielding heavy truncheons. Despite media attempts to portray this march as having been organised by republican paramilitaries, that was not the case. They were simply not around at that stage in Northern Ireland's history.

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[331] *Ibid.,* p. 218.

[332] *"The Reverend Ian Paisley, self-styled Moderator of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster, is to my mind a dangerous man and an influence for evil . . . He came to power in the 1950s, preaching a militant anti-popery, and his appeal for his followers lies both in their strong religious feelings and in their fear that the depressed Catholic third of the population would, by getting a share of power, rob them of the small measure of prosperity and security they now have."* Again, writing from a socialist perspective, rather than a nationalist one, Devlin claims, *". . . it seems clear to me that Paisley's hatred is not of the Catholic Church: his hatred is of everything on the left, and his love is his own power." (Source:* Devlin, *op. cit.,* pp. 103-104.) Ian Paisley eventually went on to become First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive created after the Good Friday Agreement.

[333] *Ibid.,* p. 221.

[334] *Ibid.,* p. 221.

Bernadette Devlin, one of the organisers of the march, recalls Paisleyites forcing the marchers to abandon their route, as well as RUC members failing to protect the marchers against Pasileyites' violence, and even the violence of RUC members themselves, who physically attacked the marchers. When the march approached Burntollet Bridge, she recalls, *"from lanes at each side of the road a curtain of bricks and boulders and bottles brought the march to a halt. From the lanes burst hordes of screaming people wielding planks of wood, bottles, lathes, iron bars, crowbars, cudgels studded with nails, and they waded into the march, beating hell out of everybody . . . As I stood there I could see a great big lump of flatwood, like a plank out of an orange box, getting nearer and nearer to my face, and there were two great nails sticking out of it . . . my hand reached my face before the wood did, and immediately two nails went into the back of my hand. Just after that I was struck on the knees with this bit of wood which had failed to get me in the face, and fell to the ground . . . I rolled up in a ball on the road, tucked my knees in, tucked my elbows in, and covered my face with one hand and the crown of my head with the other. Through my fingers I could see legs standing round me: about six people were busily involved in trying to beat me into the ground, and I could feel dull thuds landing on my back and head. Finally, these men muttered something incoherent about leaving that one, and tore off across the fields after somebody else".*[335]

After witnessing some policemen refusing to take a badly injured young girl into their vehicle, and refusing to send her to hospital, she states, *"[a] few policemen were at least trying to stop us from being killed, but the others were quite delighted we were getting what, in their terms, we deserved".*[336] In the end, *"eighty-seven people were taken to hospital from Burntollet, and many more were less seriously injured. No one was brought to justice for it, nor ever will be. Evidence was collected – by civilians, not by the police who didn't see the necessity for doing so; individuals were named; but Major Chichester-Clark, when he became Prime Minister, declared an amnesty, and our attackers need never worry about the damage they did us at Burntollet Bridge".*[337]

When the march reached the outskirts of Derry, it was attacked again by unionists throwing stones, bricks, bottles and petrol bombs. But eventually the marchers managed to get past their attackers and reach their destination: *"[W]e were in Derry, and people lined the streets and cheered. They'd put up a platform in Guildhall Square, and they wanted all of us on it at once . . . the people wanted to hear something from all of us. That was when I called Derry 'the*

[335] B Devlin, *op. cit.*, p. 139.
[336] *Ibid.*, p. 141.
[337] *Ibid.*, pp. 141-142.

capital city of injustice' – grand phrase: it flashed all over Ireland. It is impossible to describe the atmosphere . . . we had won; we hadn't lifted a finger, but we'd won".[338]

On the unionist/loyalist side, people regarded the civil rights movement, with its demands for 'one man, one vote' and better housing for all, as a threat to their government. Monck quotes one interviewee:

"At that time the propaganda was all coming out . . . The civil rights marches were all republican orientated. They were here to take over the towns and the villages and they were going to cause all sorts of problems. So, like everyone else, I had risen to the occasion and went to these parades and demonstrations. I went through the whole period of them . . . counter-demonstrations".[339]

Another person interviewed, the leader of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), Gusty Spence, stated;

"The IRA was ever in your consciousness because you had no reason to disbelieve these things when they told you: 'If you don't do this the IRA will get you'. We were very naïve people".[340]

Monck continues,

"Protestant vigilantes, such as the Shankill Defence Association, were organised. Loyalist bombs outside Belfast, designed to appear as the work of the IRA (at that time dormant), threatened the water supplies. And the Revd Ian Paisley always mounted a fierce counter-attack to civil rights events. Paisley also effectively blocked the timid moves towards reform by Stormont Prime Minister Terence O'Neill under the slogan 'O'Neill must go' ".[341]

Monck's research concludes that the civil rights marches from Coalisland to Dungannon in August 1968, and from Belfast to Derry in January 1969, were not organised by the IRA, and that the violence came from one side only – the unionists, joined on the second march by the RUC. The marchers did not physically fight back: but they did become politicised.

Elections

Bernadette Devlin, now a student member of PD (People's Democracy), stood for election in Stormont's South Derry constituency, during the NI General Election in February 1969. She polled well but lost to Major James Chichester-Clark by a margin of 40% to 60%. He went on to become Prime Minister of Northern Ireland.

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[338] *Ibid.,* p. 143.
[339] R Monk, *op. cit.,* p. 223.
[340] *Ibid.,* p. 223.
[341] *Ibid.,* p. 223.

Bernadette Devlin stood again in a Westminster by-election a couple of months later, when she was chosen as a unity candidate of republicans as well as the left, in their common belief that, by not splitting the nationalist vote, she might just win more votes than the Unionists. The voting tactic worked. Bernadette Devlin became the elected Member of Parliament to represent Mid-Ulster in April 1969, with a majority of 4,211 votes. Not alone was that the biggest ever anti-Unionist majority, she was the youngest person ever to be elected to Westminster.

The Battle of the Bogside

A few days after her election, RUC members in Derry stormed into the house of Sammy Devenney claiming to have seen rioters entering. They found no rioters but seriously assaulted Devenney, causing him to be hospitalised. When he died from his injuries a few days later, over 20,000 people attended his funeral. Five young men who were charged with rioting were found guilty and sent to prison. Derry-based Martin McGuinness[342] recalls that,

"At that stage we regarded our community as being under all-out attack by the RUC, that these people had turned into monsters. The innocuous policeman, who was involved in the football club, had suddenly overnight become a monster because Catholics were demanding civil rights".[343]

Throughout the summer of 1969, there were demonstrations, marches, parades, counter-demonstrations and riots in Derry, Belfast and Armagh. These coincided with the Protestant marching season, centring around the twelfth of July and the celebrations of Protestant King William III's defeat of Catholic King James II at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. On 12 August 1969, the Apprentice Boys procession took place around Derry's walls, an annual event commemorating the defence of the city's walls by young apprentices who had organised and motivated the population to resist a siege orchestrated by Jacobite forces, which had lasted over 100 days in 1689.

Despite calls for the Apprentice Boys procession to be banned in the interests of safety, it went ahead, something which was seen as a provocative act by Derry's nationalist citizens. The people of the Bogside decided, for their own safety, to keep their heads down, stay in their own area away from the city walls and not get involved with the marchers or the RUC. They had had enough of unionist and RUC violence and were determined to stay

[342] Martin McGuinness went on to become a leader within the Provisional IRA and Deputy First Minister of the Northern Ireland Executive created after the Good Friday Agreement.
[343] R Monck, *op. cit.,* p. 224.

passive, unless they were directly attacked in their own homes. However, when the RUC decided to lead a baton charge into the Bogside, home-made barricades were quickly erected.

Newly-elected Westminster MP Bernadette Devlin, who was there at the time, takes up the account:

"And so the Battle of the Bogside began. It was then about 4 o'clock in the afternoon of 12 August. Not for another 50 hours did the day-and-night fighting stop, and when it was over, it was the police who retreated. The Bogside was still unbreeched, and the Unionist government was a great stride nearer its downfall . . . ordinary, peaceful people, who had no desire to spend fifty hours throwing stones and petrol bombs, had realised the harm that had been done to them for half a century and were learning how to fight in self-defence. We threw up barricades of rubble, pipe and paving stones – anything we could get our hands on – to prevent the police coming straight into the area . . . Within the first half-hour eight police tenders were trapped in our barricades and if only we'd had the means to destroy them we would have burned those tenders out".[344]

Petrol bombs were manufactured by women and children and brought to the front line in crates. Stones thrown by the Bogsiders matched stones, petrol bombs and tear gas thrown by the RUC. Devlin contacted the government in the Republic, to ask them to send gasmasks, but her request was refused, despite high-level rhetoric coming from there about 'not standing idly by' and their readiness to march to the defence of the people of the Bogside. As she states,

"*He [the Taoiseach Jack Lynch]*[345] *was only playing politics: such a march would have been tantamount to a declaration of war on England, and Mr Lynch*[346] *is economically tied to Mother England's apron-strings and his army is no match for the British . . . We got medical supplies from the south, but gasmasks we had to do without. So we made do with wet blankets, with cotton wool steeped in vinegar, with handkerchiefs soaked in sodium bicarbonate, and we fought on through the night, all through the next day and the following night, and into the third day, and we showed the police that nothing they did was going to beat us".*[347]

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[344] B Devlin, *op. cit.,* p. 202.
[345] Jack Lynch was the Irish *Taoiseach* and head of government in the Republic.
[346] The Irish Army was deployed to the Border, where it set up field hospitals and distributed medical supplies. The Irish government called for the United Nations peace-keeping force to be sent to Derry.
[347] B Devlin, *op. cit.,* p. 203.

Despite the government's ban on marches imposed immediately after the Apprentice Boys Parade, the Civil Rights Association organised marches in ten other towns, hoping to relieve the pressure on the Bogside. But the RUC were not removed from the Bogside. Instead, the B-Specials (officially named the Ulster Special Constabulary) were called out, only to be relieved hours later by the British Army. The B-Specials were then sent to Belfast.

The B-Specials, according to Bernadette Devlin, were the Unionist Party's private army of reserve police, whose only entrance test was loyalty to the government. *"You don't have to do an eye-sight test; you don't have to have a minimum or a maximum height; there are no weight restrictions and no intelligence qualifications . . . once you are in you're entitled to service pay, to a gun, to all the ammunition you want . . ."*.[348]

The Belfast Attacks

The B-Specials and the RUC, armed with handguns, machine guns and armoured cars, launched a fierce assault on Belfast's nationalist citizens and their homes, with rows of houses being burnt down. Then the British Army arrived, sent in by Labour British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, and initially welcomed by republicans and nationalists.

On 13 August 1969 demonstrations, protest marches and violence broke out on the streets of Belfast, in an effort to draw government violence away from Derry. Police stations were attacked with stones and petrol bombs. The RUC responded with riot police and armoured cars. They were prevented from entering Catholic areas by burning cars placed at entrances. Hand grenades and rifle fire was also used against them. This escalation is now accepted as the first intervention by the IRA in the Troubles. Over the following days, more IRA members were called upon to protect the nationalist community. Their numbers were small, they were poorly armed and their orders prohibited the taking of life.

When nationalist crowds near the Falls Road began attacking Hastings Street RUC Station with stones and petrol bombs for a second night, they were dispersed by police and armoured cars. When the RUC moved deeper into the nationalist area of the Divis Flats, they were pelted all night with missiles from above by nationalists. Loyalist crowds then began assembling to attack nationalist homes, which were defended by hastily erected barricades. The loyalists had petrol bombs, stones, bricks, sharpened poles, guns and pikes and were assisted by the B-Specials. In retaliation, the IRA opened fire on the

[348] *Ibid.,* p. 204.

loyalists and RUC. One loyalist was killed and three RUC members were injured. Their response was to open fire on nationalists with more lethal weapons – submachine guns and armoured cars, including some fitted with Browning machine guns. The IRA responded with gunfire, petrol bombs and an explosive device. In the Divis Flats, nationalists were injured and killed inside their homes by the high velocity weaponry of the RUC. The dead included nine-year-old Patrick Rooney, the first child to die in the conflict.

A further death and more injuries took place that night, on the nationalist side, followed by loyalists attacking the nearby nationalist Divis Street and burning houses there, until they themselves came under fire from the IRA, armed with Thompson submachine guns and pistols.

Elsewhere that night, Catholic homes in Conway Street were burned to destruction by loyalists. A later government report[349] confirmed Catholic claims that the RUC did not take any action to protect them and prevented them from trying to save their homes.

More incidents took place on the Crumlin Road, between the Catholic Ardoyne district and the Protestant Woodvale, in which Catholic crowds were attacked by loyalists, aided by the RUC, who used submachine guns against nationalists.

The Sinn Féin party issued a statement on August 13, which outlined the civil rights demands, as well as broader republican demands, and called on the Irish government to take action. But in reality, Sinn Féin at that time was not responsible for the civil rights movement, nor for the disturbances in Derry or Belfast up to 13 August. Part of their statement reads:

"The present events in the six counties are the outcome of fifty years of British rule. The civil rights demands, moderate though they are, have shown us that Unionist rule is incompatible with democracy . . . The question now is no longer civil rights, but the continuation of British Rule in Ireland".[350]

On 14 August 1969, despite the existence of contrary intelligence that the NI government must have been aware of, plus the fact that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

[349] *Violence and Civil Disturbances in Northern Ireland in 1969: Report of Tribunal of Inquiry, chaired by Mr Justice Scarman.*
[350] Statement issued by Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle, 13 August, 1969.

had never sought anything other than civil rights, the NI Prime Minister[351] told the House of Commons that,

"This is not the agitation of a minority seeking by lawful means the assertion of political rights. It is the conspiracy of forces seeking to overthrow a government democratically elected by a large majority. What the teenage hooligans seek beyond cheap kicks I do not know. But of this I am quite certain – they are being manipulated and encouraged by those who seek to discredit and overthrow this government".[352]

A few days later, The Catholic Church issued a statement which totally rejected the Prime Minister's allegations:

"The fact is that on Thursday and Friday of last week the Catholic districts of Falls and Ardoyne were invaded by mobs equipped with machine guns and other firearms. A community which was virtually defenceless was swept by gunfire and streets of Catholic homes were systematically set on fire. We entirely reject the hypothesis that the origin of last week's tragedy was an armed insurrection".[353]

In the following days, more attacks on Catholics took place. Many Catholic families had to flee to Andersonstown, further away from the violence. By 15 August, the RUC had to return to their own police stations to protect them, as they were under attack. The British Army arrived some 12 hours later at the flash-points, where nationalists, including priests at the Clonard Monastery, had asked for – but had not received – protection from the RUC when they were being attacked by loyalists. Twenty IRA republicans were later arrested under the Special Powers Act.

The British Army was deployed on the nationalist Falls Road where, after several hours of inaction, during which loyalists continued to attack the houses and business of nationalists, the soldiers set up barbed wire barricades and asked the loyalists to 'desist and surrender'. Loyalists responded with petrol bombs and shots. Under orders not to shoot unless their lives were at risk, or authorised to do so by an officer, the soldiers stood by and did nothing. They eventually used tear gas to break up the loyalist attack.

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[351] James Chichester-Clark had replaced Terence O'Neill as NI Prime Minister, in the wake of moderate reforms, such as universal adult suffrage in local government elections.

[352] *Report of Tribunal of Inquiry into Violence and Civil Disturbances in Northern Ireland in 1969 (the Scarman Inquiry), https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmso/scarman.htm, Chapter 2, section 2.1.*

[353] *Ibid.*, statement by Cardinal Conway and Bishops of Derry, Clogher, Dromore, Kilmore, and Down and Connor, 23 August, 1969, section 2.1.

Over the next day or two, the Army took up positions to defend Crumlin Road. The RUC continued to stand by and refrained from interfering when loyalists set Brookfield Street alight.

The Scarman Inquiry

Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, set up the Scarman Tribunal of Inquiry into the disturbances of August 1969 which, having heard 171 witnesses, reported three years later in 1972. In the words of the Report, the riots were described as *"communal disturbances arising from a complex political, social and economic situation . . . More often than not they arose from slight beginnings: but the communal tensions were such that, once begun, they could not be controlled"*.[354]

Among the many conclusions reached by the Inquiry were that:

- the IRA did not start or plan the riots in Derry, Ardoyne, Falls Road or Newry and were taken by surprise by them;
- the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association bore a heavy, albeit indirect, responsibility for the horrors that occurred on 14 August;
- there was no organised campaign of armed insurrection by one side, nor of armed vengeance by the other;
- The RUC failed to prevent Protestant mobs burning down houses on Conway Street, but they believed they were dealing with an uprising engineered by the IRA;
- police strength was not sufficient to deal with the situation; and
- overall, *"the RUC struggled manfully to do their duty in a situation which they could not control. Their courage . . . was beyond praise; their ultimate failure to maintain order arose not from their mistakes, nor from any lack of professional skill, but from exhaustion and shortage of numbers"*.[355]

We have seen Bernadette Devlin's first-hand account of what happened in Derry during the attacks and rioting in August 1969. The Scarman report said that although her participation in the rioting was 'limited', she bore some responsibility for encouraging the people of the Bogside to use violence against the police. For an English High Court Judge not to even qualify this legal finding, to the effect that people are entitled to use reasonable,

[354] *Ibid.*, section 2.4.
[355] *Ibid.*, section 3.10.

proportionate violence to protect themselves and their properties when both are under attack, having studiously resisted violence against unprovoked violence up to that stage, renders that particular Scarman finding simply typical of British disingenuousness.

Regarding the RUC, the Report acknowledged that some members had made mistakes and acted wrongly on occasion, such as failing to take action when Protestant mobs burned Catholic houses in Belfast in mid-August, but concluded, *". . . the general case of a partisan force cooperating with Protestant mobs to attack Catholic people is devoid of substance, and we reject it, completely".*[356]

Police Ombudsman Historical Inquiry

Needless to say, nationalists rejected the Scarman Inquiry Report as an overall whitewash. Their belief was partially vindicated when, some 50 years later, a historical investigation into the riots in Belfast during August 1969 – and the deaths of four people as a result of that rioting, Patrick Rooney (aged 9), Hugh McCabe (aged 20), Samuel McClarnon (aged 27) and Michael Lynch (aged 28) – was conducted by the Police Ombudsman in Northern Ireland. This Report, published in May 2021, found that:

- all four victims had been shot and killed by police gunfire in the Divis and Ardoyne areas during the disturbances in Belfast on the night of 14/15 August 1969;
- the RUC had failed to effectively investigate any of the deaths;
- there had been inadequate forensic examinations; and
- there was no evidence that any RUC members had been interviewed about the deaths with a view to possible criminal charges.

All of these failings contributed to a situation where those responsible for the killings were rendered unlikely to be prosecuted or disciplined.

The Ombudsman Report also found that:

- the RUC decision to use vehicle-mounted machine guns was *"fundamentally flawed";*
- the firing of shots, from an RUC station opposite the Divis Flats directly at the flats, by a police marksman, was a matter for criticism; and

[356] *Ibid.,* section 3.2.

- the distribution of weapons for use by RUC members in the Ardoyne deaths meant that no individual member, or members, responsible for the deaths could be ascertained.
- The Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service found that no RUC officers should be prosecuted owing to the lack of evidence, over 50 years on.

International Reaction

It seems painfully obvious that a British Tribunal of Inquiry was never going to report the truth of what really happened in Northern Ireland during August 1969. Thankfully, millions of people around the world had been eye-witnesses to those events, and they had seen the truth for themselves on their television sets. International views of the events in Northern Ireland during August 1969 were far more critical of the British and Northern Irish response to the disturbances.

The International Commission of Jurists (an international, non-governmental association of 60 eminent jurists, promoting human rights and the rule of law) issued a report which claimed that the government in Northern Ireland practiced police brutality, discrimination against Catholics and gerrymandering in politics, and that the protection of human rights was *"inadequately assured"*.[357]

Derry became internationally renowned, with the defensive efforts of the Bogsiders being copied by protesters in Czechoslovakia in August 1969. Media people came from all over the world to investigate the 'theory of petrol bomb fighting', as well as how best to erect barricades.

The Bogsiders were bemused by their new-found fame and proud of themselves for having beaten back the RUC. As Bernadette Devlin states, *"we (had) reached then a turning point in Irish history, and we reached it because of the determination of one group of people in a Catholic slum area of Derry. In fifty hours we brought a government to its knees, and we gave back to a down-trodden people their pride and the strength of their conviction"*.[358]

No British government Inquiry was ever going to publicly agree with that perspective. On the contrary, perhaps succeeding governments thought that the nationalist people of

[357] P Rose, *How The Troubles Came to Northern Ireland* (London, 2001), p. 160.
[358] B Devlin, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

Belfast and Derry needed to be taught a lesson.[359] Readers can reach their own conclusions after reading the following sections.

Britain's Escalating Violence Against Innocent Civilians

During the next few years in the North, the British Army shot and killed 25 totally innocent nationalist people, 14 in Derry's Bogside and 11 in Belfast's Ballymurphy. They then did their best to lie about their actions, in an effort to convince the world that they had been fired on first and were acting in self-defence. In one case, the British government set up another Tribunal of Enquiry, relying on another senior High Court Judge in England to find the soldiers blameless for the shooting dead of unarmed civilians, which he obligingly did. In the other case, the actions of the British Army soldiers involved were only officially determined by the eventual holding of an Inquest, some fifty years later.

The true events surrounding Derry's Bloody Sunday massacre, and Belfast's Ballymurphy massacre, are told below.

The Ballymurphy Massacre

Internment without trial was introduced on 9 August 1971, a provision under which anyone (but, in reality the focus was solely on republicans) could be arrested and imprisoned without charge or trial, from as young as 10 years of age. Residents of nationalist areas immediately began to build barricades to defend themselves from British Army invasions and unjust arrests.

Between 9 and 11 August 1971, the 1st Battalion, Parachute Regiment of the British Army[360] shot and killed eleven civilians in cold blood, one of them a Catholic priest, waving a white handkerchief, who was attending a dying man. In May 2021, fifty years later, a Coroner's Inquest found that all of the deceased had been unarmed innocent civilians, who had posed no threat to the soldiers who killed them. The Inquest rejected the Army's claims that they had been firing in self-defence, ruled that all of the people killed had been

[359] Edward Heath, leader of the Conservative Party, served as British Prime Minister from 1970 to 1974.

[360] This regiment of the British Army, also referred to as 1 PARA, is an elite airborne unit of the Special Forces Support Group which was deployed to Northern Ireland under 'Operation Banner'.

innocent of any crime, violence or disturbance, and that every one of the killings had been totally unjustified.[361]

In fact, none of the people shot had been carrying weapons or acting in a confrontational way. The circumstances of those who were shot on 9 August included:

- two who were giving help to a person already shot, one of whom was a priest giving the last rites;
- two who were standing opposite the Army Base in Ballymurphy, one of them a mother of ten, who died in full view of soldiers at the base, who was lying on the ground for hours without receiving treatment and who was allowed to die that way; and the other, who was arrested and subsequently released, and claimed, before he died, that he had been beaten and shot a second time while in custody, something confirmed at his autopsy; and
- another man who was shot 14 times as he lay on the ground.

Of those killed, several were shot multiple times; while one was killed by an unknown assassin (with no attempt by the RUC to identify his killer); and another, who underwent a mock killing by soldiers when an empty gun was put in his mouth and the trigger pulled, died of a heart attack soon afterwards.

Inquests into the killings were delayed for years, in an attempt to cover up the scandal, a practice that was deliberate policy of then and future Northern Ireland governments.

In 1972, an inquest into the killings had returned an 'open verdict'. But in 2021, a coroner's report held that all of the killings had been unjustified and that all of those killed had been completely innocent of any crime.

In 2022, more than 40 years later, families of some of the deceased settled their civil claims for damages, negligence and misfeasance in public office against the Ministry for Defence at the High Court in Belfast.

The Bloody Sunday Massacre

A few months after the unlawful killing of civilians in Ballymurphy, the same British Army Regiment, the First Battalion of the Paratroopers, carried out another atrocity, this time on

[361] Those killed on 9 August were: Francis Quinn (19); Father Hugh Mullan (38); Joan Connolly (44); Daniel Teggert (44); Noel Phillips (20); Joseph Murphy (41). On 10 August Edward Doherty (28) was shot. Those shot and killed on 11 August were: John Laverty (20); Joseph Corr (43); John McKerr (49) (assassin unidentified); Paddy McCarthy (44).

the streets of Derry. The events of 'Bloody Sunday', as it came to be known, saw the killing of 13 people by soldiers of the British Army, and the serious injuring of 14 others, one of whom subsequently died from his injuries, while they were engaged in a peaceful march, on 30 January, 1972,[362] a march organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. The marchers called for an end to the law in Northern Ireland that violated a basic human right – internment without trial.

Bernadette Devlin confronts the Home Secretary Reginald Maudling

Reginald Maudling, the Tory government's Home Secretary at the time of Bloody Sunday, accepting and agreeing with British Army statements, told the House of Commons, during a debate on what had happened on Bloody Sunday, that the British Army had only opened fire in self-defence, that they had no wish to be in Northern Ireland and were only there to carry out their duty to serve the Crown and to protect and maintain law and order. He accused the marchers of using firearms against the soldiers, and claimed that the soldiers had only fired in self-defence.[363]

When MP Bernadette Devlin repeatedly tried to speak in reply, she was not allowed to do so, despite being the Member of the House for the constituency concerned, and despite being an eyewitness to what had happened. In her frustration, she called Maudling a liar, rose from her seat, and crossed the floor of the House to confront him.

Her reaction is described in the following account posted on-line in April 2019, almost 50 years later. Having given Devlin's background, the history of her civil rights activity in the North, and her election as an MP for Mid-Ulster, the post continues:

"Bernadette, still traumatised after seeing her fellow marchers gunned down in cold blood, had to gather herself and fly to London, sitting as MP for Mid-Ulster. What happened next is almost unbelievable. The debate began in the House of Commons with Reginald Maudling.

"Bernadette walked up to Reginald Maudling, the Home Secretary who had just lied to the world to cover up a massacre by the British Army, and slapped him. A brawl quickly broke out, with

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[362] John Francis Duddy (aged 17); Patrick Joseph Doherty (aged 31); Hugh Pius Gilmore (aged 17); Bernard McGuigan (aged 41); John Pius Young (aged 17); Michael McDaid (aged 20); William Noel Walsh (aged 19); Michael Kelly (aged 17); Kevin McElhinney (aged 17); James Joseph Wray (aged 22); Gerald McKinney (aged 35); Gerald Donaghy (aged 17) and William McKinney (aged 26). John Johnston, who was not on the march, was shot and died some time afterwards.
The injured were Michael Bradley; Michael Bridge; Patrick Campbell; Margaret Deery; Damian Donaghy; Joseph Friel; Joseph Mahon; Patrick McDaid; Daniel McGowan; Alexander Nash; Patrick O'Donnell and Michael Quinn.

[363] See *https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1972-0201/debates, columns 324-327.*

Tories attacking the 5-foot tall, 23-year-old woman and Labour MPs flying to her defence – the parliamentary session was suspended . . . Afterward, with the callousness for which it's all too well-known, the British Press gave far more outrage to Bernadette lightly slapping the Home Secretary than the fact that 13 British citizens had just been murdered by the Army in Derry. Confronted by journalists outside Westminster, she was asked what she thought she had achieved by hitting Maudling. Bernadette, the working-class girl from South Tyrone, replied: 'What I achieved was simply delivering to the Home Secretary a proletarian protest at the fact he was responsible for the murder of thirteen people'.

"One journalist, putting his medieval worldview beyond doubt, accused Bernadette's action of being 'unladylike'! Bernadette recalled this recently in an interview on the Blindboy Podcast, saying, 'if he thought acts of resistance to power weren't appropriate to women, then he'd obviously not heard of people like Constance Markievicz and the Suffragettes!'

"Bernadette wasn't a violent woman. As a leader in the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, she'd advocated Martin Luther King's philosophy of non-violence as a method of political protest. But in the face of a wealthy, Conservative Home Secretary falsely blaming oppressed Irish Catholics for their own murder at the hands of his soldiers without so much as expressing regret for their deaths, not even Gandhi himself could have turned the other cheek. As Bernadette said recently: 'My only regret is that I did not hit him hard enough' ".[364]

Bernadette Devlin was, in today's parlance, 'speaking truth to power'. It took a very long time for the truth to finally be acknowledged by that same power. There were two Tribunals of Inquiry set up by the British government, as well as an Irish government investigation of new evidence and various academic and media investigations into the deaths and subsequent cover-ups. Their results are presented below. They show to what lengths the British government was prepared to resort in an attempt to cover up their murderous actions, and how long it took them, in the face of sustained campaigns and irrefutable evidence, to admit the truth.

The Widgery Tribunal and Report 1972

The killings and attempted killings by members of the Parachute Regiment "*sent shock waves of anger, grief and indignation . . . throughout the island of Ireland, the wider Irish community abroad and the international community*".[365] Despite a Tribunal of Enquiry

[364] *https://radicalteatowel.co.uk/blog/bernadette-devlin-and-the-slap-heard-round-the -world.*
[365] *Bloody Sunday and the Report of the Widgery Tribunal, the Irish Government's Assessment of the New Material Presented to the British Government in June 1997,*

established by the British government in February 1972 (and reporting in April of that year), the relatives of the people who were killed, and indeed the wider public, did not believe that its Chairman, Lord Widgery, Chief Justice of England and Wales, had honestly attempted to find out and report the truth of what had really happened. They believed the Report was deliberately misleading and incomplete, and that its sole intention was to find that no soldiers were culpable for the deaths that had occurred. Indeed, among some of the conclusions reached, the Widgery Report put the blame for the deaths that day on those who had organised the march, and stated *"there is no reason to suppose that the soldiers would have opened fire if they had not been fired upon first".*

Being unable to prove that the innocent people who were killed or injured had actually 'fired first' (because they had not), the Widgery Report stated: *"None of the deceased or wounded is proved to have been shot whilst handling a firearm or bomb. Some are wholly acquitted of complicity in such action; but there is a strong suspicion that some others had been firing weapons or handling bombs in the course of the afternoon and that yet others had been closely supporting them".*[366] In other words, supposition, suspicion and deflection of blame were seized upon as credible alternatives to hard evidence and truthful findings.

The Irish Government's Assessment of New Evidence

The relatives of the people killed on Bloody Sunday, the injured victims, the other marchers and the wider public denounced the Widgery Report and campaigned tirelessly for a second Inquiry to establish the truth.

In 1997, following an official Irish government assessment of new evidence, the Irish government stated:

"Th[is] government has long shared the widespread view that the Widgery Report was unsatisfactory and that it did not represent the truth of what happened on that day. Indeed the very disregard with which the Widgery Report was viewed by nationalists, particularly those in Derry, has meant that they have largely ignored it, so far removed was its version of events from the reality of what they believed happened in Derry on 30 January 1972 . . . On the other hand, for the British authorities, the Widgery Report remains the official version of events".[367]

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https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/irgovt.htm#intro, Preface.

[366] *Report of the Tribunal appointed to inquire into the events on Sunday, 30 January, 1972, which led to the loss of life in connection with the procession in Londonderry on that day, https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hmso/widgery.htm (Summary of Conclusions #10).*

[367] *Irish Government's Assessment*, Preface (*https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/irgovt.htm*).

The Irish government's assessment of the new evidence concluded that:

"the Widgery Inquiry was partisan and selective in the evidence which it chose to consider and accept. Significantly, Don Mullen[368] *concludes on the basis of a variety of sources that shots were fired by the British Army from the vicinity of Derry Walls, that these shots hit a number of civilians and that the evidence of three of the fatalities indicates that they died of these shots. Lord Widgery never considered such a possibility despite evidence to that effect having been available to him".*[369]

The Irish government's assessment also alluded to the research evidence of Professor Dermot Walsh,[370] concerning statements by British soldiers to the Military Police and later to Treasury Solicitors around the time of Bloody Sunday, which had not been made available to Counsel for the next-of-kin at the Tribunal. According to Professor Walsh, the statements contained *"substantial material discrepancies"*, amounting to a concealment of relevant material by the Tribunal, which undermined the cross-examinations of the soldiers by Counsel for the next-of-kin. As such, Walsh concluded that the Widgery Report's findings were rendered *"fatally flawed".*[371]

Other evidence uncovered by Professor Walsh demonstrated that the Tribunal was inherently biased against the victims and in favour of the soldiers:

"Aspects of the Tribunal's Report such as the concentration on fatal shootings, the excessive reliance on the veracity of the Army, the failure to deal with key policy issues and the presentation of material to show the Army in the most favourable light, compounded [the] appearance of bias and further undermined the capacity of the Tribunal to achieve its task".[372]

The Irish government's assessment also referred to a Channel 4 News broadcast of an interview with British soldiers who had been in Derry on Bloody Sunday, and who confirmed that shots had been fired by soldiers from Derry's Walls. The news report also mentioned the absence of military command at the time and that officials at the Widgery Tribunal had changed the evidence of at least one soldier regarding the events of that day.

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[368] D Mullen (ed.), *Eyewitness Bloody Sunday, The Truth* (1997), which contains civilian eye-witness reports from over 500 people, given to the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the National Council for Civil Liberties, as well as newly released archival material on Army and RUC communications, and reassessments of preliminary forensic and medical information.
[369] *Irish Government's Assessment*, *Preface* (*https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/irgovt.htm*).
[370] Professor D Walsh, *The Bloody Sunday Tribunal of Inquiry, A Resounding Defeat for Truth, Justice and the Rule of Law* (1997), (*https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/walsh.htm*).
[371] *Ibid.*
[372] *Ibid.*

Similarly, The Sunday Business Post produced information to the effect that one soldier's evidence to the Tribunal had been amended by officials, *"in an apparent attempt to justify the killings"*.[373]

The Irish government confirmed that research conducted on over 100 eye-witness statements, taken by Irish government officials in 1972, corresponded with those set out in Don Mullen's book. Moreover, much of this 'new' evidence produced by the Irish government had either been presented to the Tribunal, or the Tribunal had been aware of it. It had also been made available to Counsel for the official side of the Tribunal, but was withheld from Counsel for the relatives.

Despite evidence to the contrary, which it ignored, distorted or otherwise chose not to believe, the Widgery Tribunal found that no soldiers were to blame for the killings and that, on the contrary, while on occasion the shots fired were 'bordering on the reckless', the soldiers were shooting at gunmen and bomb throwers and were acting in self-defence.

Widgery Report Rejected 1998

In May 1997, Tony Blair was elected Labour Prime Minister of Great Britain, with a landslide majority. On 29 January, 1998 (26 years after the events of Bloody Sunday and the Report of the Widgery Tribunal), he reminded the House of Commons that Widgery's findings included:

- that shots had been fired at the soldiers before they started firing, which led to the casualties;
- that for the most part the soldiers acted as they did because they thought their standing orders required it; and
- that whilst there was no proof that any of the deceased had been shot whilst handling a firearm or bomb, there was a strong suspicion that some had been firing weapons or handling bombs in the course of the afternoon.

Blair referred to new evidence that had since emerged, including the assessment made by the Irish government. Having personally assessed all the new evidence and consulted with others, he was convinced that the Widgery Tribunal's Report should be re-examined. Accordingly, Lord Saville, assisted by two other members, would conduct a new Inquiry, and should *"be allowed the time necessary to cover all the evidence now available thoroughly and completely . . . to establish the truth about what happened on that day as far as that can be achieved*

[373] *Irish Government Investigation Report, Preface,* (*https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/irgovt.htm*).

at 26 years' distance . . . [M]embers of the families of the victims . . . do not want recrimination . . . they do not want revenge. But they do want the truth. . . . It is in the interests of everyone that the truth is established, and told. Bloody Sunday was a tragic day for all concerned. We must wish it had never happened. Our concern now is simply to establish the truth, and close this painful chapter once and for all".[374]

The Saville Tribunal Report, 2010

The Saville Inquiry reported on 15 June, 2010. An ITV report of its findings was unequivocal: *"The findings . . . turn the discredited 1972 Widgery Report on its head. It exonerated the victims and delivered a damning account of the conduct of soldiers, including that they had fired more than 100 rifle rounds and were unjustified in killing 13 people on the day and injuring more."* The news report quoted some of the key Saville Tribunal findings, *viz* that none of the dead had posed a threat; that the soldiers had no justification for shooting and had not done so in self-defence, nor as a result of a threat from any quarter.[375]

Finally, after 38 years, the victims, families, marchers and organisers of the civil rights march in Derry on 30 January, 1972, that called for an end to internment without trial, were vindicated. Tremendous credit must go to the people who never stopped demanding the truth, demanding justice, demanding that the allegations against the innocent be found false, and demanding that the blame for the deaths and injuries inflicted on that day should be laid at the door of those responsible. But the fact remains that the British had to be forced and humiliated into this process, an ultimately truthful process, where initially they had done everything in their power, for decades, to deny and cover up the truth.

Tony Blair's Labour government did not last long enough to be in power when the Saville Inquiry reported in 2010. How did the new Conservative government react to the Saville findings? In fairness to him, Prime Minister David Cameron's response was exceptional. He told the House of Commons:

"*. . . the conclusions of this report are absolutely clear. There is no doubt, there is nothing unequivocal, there are no ambiguities. What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable. It was wrong. What happened should never, ever have happened. The families of those who died should not have had to live with the pain and the hurt of that day and with a lifetime of loss. Some members of our armed forces acted wrongly. The government is ultimately responsible*

[374] *https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/bsunday/tb29198.htm.*
[375] *https://www.itv.com/news/utv/2022-01-28/the-main-findings-of-lord-savilles-bloody-sunday-inquiry.*

for the conduct of the armed forces and for that, on behalf of the government, indeed, on behalf of our country, I am deeply sorry."[376]

However, since then, the British have dragged their feet in having the only soldier to be prosecuted brought to justice and, even then, justice has been the victim of more feet-dragging. To date, fourteen years after the Saville Tribunal findings and David Cameron's apology, that soldier remains a free man, unlikely ever to face trial.

The Birmingham Six, The Guildford Four and the Maguire Family

In October and November 1974, a bombing campaign on the British mainland, carried out by the Provisional IRA, resulted in the bombing of three pubs. One was in Guildford, killing 1 civilian and four soldiers and injuring 8 people. Two more were in Birmingham, killing 21 people and injuring 182 others. The reaction of Britain's security forces to those bombings was to target, arrest, physically and psychologically torture, prosecute and find guilty on the sole basis of manufactured and false incriminating evidence, several innocent Irish civilians living in the UK, purely in the interests of indiscriminate revenge, instead of finding and prosecuting those actually responsible for the bombings, in the interests of lawful justice. This resulting conspiracy of injustice ranged from the police, to the prison authorities, to the forensic teams, to the prosecuting lawyers, to the medical witnesses and all the way up to the highest members of the judiciary. Not one of them spoke out, or called a halt to the injustice that was unfolding before their eyes. It took public campaigns, lasting many years, to finally reveal the truth and have it believed.

The Birmingham bomb exploded after 8 o'clock in the evening of 21 November, 1974. Earlier that day, five men from Northern Ireland, who had lived in Birmingham since the 1960s, left the city to travel to Belfast for the funeral of an IRA member whom they all knew (but did not know he was a member of the IRA). They were stopped and searched by Special Branch before news of the bombing in Birmingham broke. When it did, the men were taken into custody. Another man was arrested at his house in Birmingham.

While there, the men were deprived of sleep and food, were questioned without a break for 12 hours at a time, were threatened, assaulted, attacked by dogs and, in one man's case, subjected to a mock execution. Four of the men (William Power, Hugh Callaghan, John Walker and Richard McIllkenny) confessed to membership of the IRA and the bombing of the pubs, confessions which they later retracted, claiming they had been falsely obtained

[376] *https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/15/bloody-sunday-report-saville-inquiry.*

by coercion and physical and psychological abuse. Police claimed two others (Patrick Hill and Gerard Hunter) had verbally confessed.

At their trial, all six were found guilty of 21 counts of murder by the jury and given life sentences. Forensic evidence against them, produced by Dr Frank Skuse, claiming that they had all handled explosives, was accepted, while defence evidence to the contrary was rejected. Despite having refused a defence application to have the coerced confessions omitted, the Judge (Judge Bridge) called the evidence *"the most overwhelming I have ever heard"*.

The six men applied to appeal their convictions in March 1976. Their applications were refused. That same year they attempted to sue the Lancashire and West Midlands Police, and the Home Office, for the injuries they suffered while in police custody. Lord Denning refused their applications in 1980. Patrick Hill embarked on a 4-week hunger strike, to no avail.

As with Lord Widgery's Bloody Sunday Tribunal Report, the British legal process was once again abused and undermined at the highest possible level, in order to thwart legitimate opportunities for innocent Irish people to prove their innocence. It took years of academic research, campaigning, media reports and public demonstrations to tilt the balance in favour of the indisputable credibility of the men's innocence. Much praise must go to journalist Chris Mullin, journalist and former MP, for the 1985 Granada TV *World in Action* programme, which exposed reasons for believing the men's convictions were wrongful. Mullin also published a book, *Error of Judgment: The Truth about the Birmingham Six Pub Bombings,* containing detailed arguments as to why the men were innocent, prompting the then Home Secretary to refer the case once more to the Court of Appeal. However, in January 1988 that Court ruled that the convictions were safe and satisfactory and denied the appeals.

The campaign to release the men continued. They were finally released in 1991, having spent almost 20 years in prison.

Ten years later they were awarded compensation in the region of £1 million each. No police officers were ever charged. The Guardian newspaper called the case *"one of the gravest miscarriages of justice in British history"*. In an article published in March 2022, it claimed that:

"The Birmingham Six story was not only one of extreme police misconduct. What took it to an additional level of monstrosity were the actions of some of the judiciary, who seemed more concerned with upholding the reputation of the criminal justice system than seeking the truth. In 1980, the Master of the Rolls, Lord Denning, threw out a civil action that the six had brought against West Midlands Police. He described the possible revelation of police perjury and violence as "such an appalling vista that every sensible person would say, 'It cannot be right that these actions should go any further' ".

He later said that if the six had been hanged, *"we shouldn't have all these campaigns to have them released".* We can reasonably conclude that he would have much preferred to order the innocent men to be hanged, rather than to allow their appeals on the basis that they were innocent.

As well as praise due to Chris Mullin and all those who had campaigned to free the Birmingham Six, special thanks must go to their legal representatives, including Michael Mansfield QC and solicitor Gareth Peirce, who also fought tirelessly, and gained freedom from wrongful convictions, for the Guildford Four[377] and the Maguire Family,[378] all of whom were also Irish people living in Britain, all of whom were also wrongfully convicted of IRA-related bombings in England during the 1970s, and all of whom were subsequently freed as totally innocent people after long periods of imprisonment. Similar tactics to those used by the police against the Birmingham Six – including torture, physical assault, lack of sleep, contamination of evidence, non-disclosure of evidence in the accuseds' favour, non-disclosure of alibi evidence, perjury and unsafe forensic evidence – were used against the Guildford Four and the Maguire Family.

The Judge who presided over the Guildford Four trial, Lord Justice John Donaldson, expressed his regret that the defendants had only been charged with murder, and not treason, which still retained the death penalty. And fearing that he himself might be dead before being consulted by the Home Secretary regarding the consideration of the defendants' possible release date, he recommended minimum terms of 30 years for Gerry Conlon; 35 years for Paddy Armstrong; and until such time as he had reached 'a great age' for Paul Hill.

[377] Paul Hill (21); Gerard Conlon (21); Paddy Armstrong (25) and Carole Richardson (17).
[378] Annie Maguire (40); husband Patrick Maguire (42); son Patrick (14); son Vincent (17); brother Sean Smyth (37); Patrick O'Neill (35); and brother-in-law Patrick Giuseppe Conlon (52).

In 1977, IRA volunteers who had been arrested following the Balcombe Street hostage-taking in London, instructed their lawyers to tell the police that they were guilty of the Guildford bombings. Despite being told this, the police did not charge them. The Guildford Four remained in prison for twelve more years, entirely innocent.

In 1989 the convictions against the Guildford Four were quashed. Similarly, those against the Maguire family were quashed in 1991, except for one – Giuseppe Conlon, the father of Gerry Conlon of the Guildford Four, who had died in prison in 1980, a totally innocent man.

While the Birmingham Six case, the Guildford Four case, and that of the Maguire Family, were given wide publicity after their release, and *R v Maguire* became the leading case in the UK on the issue of non-disclosure of evidence by the police, Lord Justice Donaldson went on to become a highly respected and honoured Judge and was promoted to the position of Master of the Rolls (Head of the Civil Division of the Court of Appeal), succeeding that other upstanding defender and dispenser of British justice, Lord Denning.

The Continuing War and its Casualties

The war waged by the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) against the British presence in Northern Ireland continued for many more years. The atrocity carried out by the British Paratroopers on Bloody Sunday (30 January, 1972) led to hundreds of recruits joining the IRA which, up until then, had been mainly dormant.[379] In the following 30 years, the Troubles spilled over into the British mainland and the Irish Republic, causing thousands of deaths, on both sides. Some of the most notable attacks and reprisals between 1972 and 1993 are listed below.

August 1971: Ballymurphy massacre. Eleven unarmed Catholic civilians shot dead, and many wounded, by the British Army's First Parachute Regiment in Belfast.

January 1972: Magilligan Internment Camp. The same Parachute Regiment brutally attacked protestors outside Magilligan Internment Camp.

[379] The IRA split into two opposing factions in December 1969: the Provisional IRA and the Official IRA. Further references to the IRA after that date will be to the Provisionals (or 'Provos'), unless otherwise stated. The Provisionals and the INLA opposed the British presence in Northern Ireland with military action. The political parties with which they were associated were Sinn Féin and the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) respectively. The Official IRA announced a permanent ceasefire in May 1972.

January 1972: Bloody Sunday. The same Paratroopers shot and killed 13 unarmed civilians and injured 14 others (one of whom later died from his injuries) who were participating in a peaceful civil rights march.

February 1972: Aldershot bombing. Seven people were killed by a car bomb at Aldershot Barracks in England, in retaliation for Bloody Sunday.

April 1972: IRA mass bombings. Twenty-four IRA bombs exploded in towns and cities across the North, involving 14 shoot-outs between the IRA and the British Army.

9 July 1972: Springhill massacre. British snipers shot dead five unarmed civilians in the nationalist Springhill housing estate in Belfast.

13-14 July 1972: Gun battles across Belfast. In a series of gun battles over two days, the IRA and the British Army carried out attacks against each other, culminating in the deaths of six British soldiers, several IRA volunteers and several civilians.

21 July 1972: Bloody Friday. The IRA exploded over 20 bombs within 75 minutes in Belfast, killing nine people, including 5 civilians, 2 British Army soldiers and 1 UDA (Ulster Defence Association) volunteer and wounding 130.

31 July 1972: Operation Motorman. The British Army sent 12,000 troops to IRA-controlled 'no go' areas of Belfast and Derry.

August 1972: Belfast pub attack. The IRA attacked and bombed the Bayardo Bar in Belfast, frequented by Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) members. Four Protestant civilians and one UVF member were killed.

September 1972: Hilton Hotel bombing. The IRA killed two people and injured 63 by bombing the Hilton Hotel in London.

October 1972: Green Park Tube Station bombing. The IRA killed one person and injured 20 others, by exploding a bomb at Green Park Tube station, London.

12 November 1972: Scott's Oyster Bar bombing. The IRA exploded a bomb in Scott's Oyster Bar, London, killing one and injuring 15.

18 November 1972: Watson's Restaurant bombing. The IRA exploded a bomb in Chelsea's Watson's Restaurant, killing 2 and injuring 23.

February 1974: M62 coach bombing. Eight British soldiers, one army wife and two children were killed by an IRA bomb as they travelled in a coach on the M62 motorway in Yorkshire, England.

April 1974: 1,000th victim of the Troubles. James Murphy, a petrol station owner living in County Fermanagh, became the 1,000th victim of the Troubles.

May 1974: Dublin and Monaghan bombings. Thirty-three civilians were killed and 300 wounded, the highest number of casualties in an explosion during the Troubles. The UVF accepted responsibility in July 1993. The British refused to cooperate with Irish government requests for information on those responsible. The British Army is also believed to have been involved.

October and November 1974: Guildford and Birmingham bombings. The IRA exploded bombs in pubs in Guildford and Birmingham, England, killing 26 people, and injuring 190 others.

1975–1982: Shankill Butchers killings. The Shankill Butchers, a loyalist paramilitary organisation based in the Shankill area of Belfast, carried out numerous sectarian attacks on nationalists, killing at least 23 by kidnapping, torturing, beating and slashing their necks with a butcher's knife, or killing them with a hatchet. They also carried out revenge killings on some Protestants.

June 1975: Attempt to derail Kildare train. An attempt to derail a passenger train in Straffan, County Kildare was thwarted by a civilian, Christopher Phelan, who was stabbed to death for his efforts by the UVF.

17 July 1975: Forkhill bombing. Four British Soldiers were killed by an IRA remote-controlled bomb at Forkhill, County Armagh.

31 July 1975: Miami Showband massacre. The UVF (including members of the Ulster Defence Regiment) shot and killed three members of the Miami Showband at Buskhill, County Down, and also accidentally blew up two of their own volunteers.

17 February 1978: La Mon Restaurant bombing. An IRA bomb killed 12 people and injured 30 others when an incendiary bomb exploded at the restaurant near Belfast.

1976-1981: Attacks on prison officers. Following the withdrawal of Special Category Status for political prisoners, imprisoned IRA volunteers asked the Army Council to authorise the killing of prison officers. Nineteen were to be shot dead over the next five years.

March 1979: Airey Neave MP killed. The Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) exploded a car bomb at Westminster, killing Conservative MP Airey Neave, close colleague of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

August 1979: Mullaghmore and Warrenpoint bombings. The IRA carried out two attacks: one at Mullaghmore in County Sligo, killing Lord Mountbatten (Queen Elizabeth's cousin) and three others, as well as injuring three more, when a bomb exploded on their boat. On the same day, the South Armagh Brigade of the IRA blew up a British Army convoy, and ambushed incoming reinforcements. Eighteen soldiers of the Parachute Regiment were killed and more than twenty were seriously injured.

October 1984: Brighton bombing. The IRA bombed the Grand Hotel in Brighton, where the Tory party was holding its annual conference. Five people were killed and over 30 injured. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher escaped death.[380]

May 1987: Loughgall killings. The SAS ambushed and killed 8 IRA volunteers at Loughgall RUC station in County Tyrone.

November 1987: Enniskillen bombing. The IRA exploded a bomb at a British war memorial service in Enniskillen intended for non-civilians. It killed eleven civilians. Gerry Adams, Sinn Féin president, later apologised.

March 1988: SAS killings in Gibraltar, and related killings in Belfast. Three unarmed IRA volunteers, Máiréad Farrell, Daniel McCann and Sean Savage, were killed by the SAS in Gibraltar. The European Court of Human Rights found they had been "unlawfully killed". At their funerals, some days after their deaths, mourners were attacked In Milltown Cemetery, Belfast, by Michael Stone, a member of the UDA, who threw hand grenades and fired pistols at the crowd, killing three people and wounding more than 60 others. Stone was caught by some of the mourners and beaten, before being rescued and arrested by the RUC. A few days later, at the funeral of one of Stone's victims, two non-uniformed British Army soldiers drove into the crowd at the cemetery. They were dragged from their car, beaten and later shot dead by the IRA.

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[380] The IRA issued this statement the following day: *"Mrs Thatcher will now realise that Britain cannot occupy our country and torture our prisoners and shoot our people in their own streets and get away with it. Today we were unlucky, but remember we only have to be lucky once. You will have to be lucky always. Give Ireland peace and there will be no more war".* If Margaret Thatcher felt intimidated, she did not show it. Her reaction to the bombing was to continue with the conference and to address the delegates by saying that the bombing *"was an attempt to cripple Her Majesty's democratically elected government. That is the scale of the outrage in which we have all shared, and the fact that we are all gathered here now – shocked, but composed and determined – is a sign not only that this attack has failed, but that all attempts to destroy democracy by terrorism will fail".*

February 1989: Solicitor Pat Finucane killed at his home in Belfast. UDA member Ken Barrett shot Finucane, along with another unidentified shooter. In 2012, UK Prime Minister apologised for State collusion in his death. Following many years of campaigning by his wife and family, the British government ordered a Public Inquiry into his death (September 2024). The British government had been ordered by several courts to hold such an Inquiry and had been criticised for previous investigations failing compliance with human rights legislation.

July 1990: Ian Gow MP killed in car bomb explosion. The IRA placed a bomb under the car of Ian Gow, a close ally of Margaret Thatcher, which exploded and killed the Conservative Member of Parliament outside his home in Sussex.

March 1993: Warrington bombing. Two young boys were killed and dozens more injured when an IRA bomb exploded in Warrington, near Manchester.

The above account is not a full chronology of all the bombings, killings and death. Both sides suffered terrible tragedies. Both sides inflicted horrific deaths and injuries. That is the nature of war. Throughout those years there were repeated calls for peace; new political initiatives were attempted; paramilitary ceasefires were declared and broken; and secret negotiations between opposing sides took place, all to no lasting avail.

Prisoners' Initiatives

But perhaps the most important initiative was one that was not welcomed by anyone. It arose from a demand by republican prisoners in the early 1980s, who felt that their situation had become unbearable, and their suffering ignored and forgotten, following the introduction of Britain's 'Ulsterisation Policy', which included a new criminalisation policy and the subsequent withdrawal of political status for prisoners in Northern Ireland. It is to their story that we must now turn.

Special Category Status and Criminalisation

In July 1972, four months after the Tory government led by Edward Heath had taken over the administration of Northern Ireland by direct rule, the Secretary of State (NI), Willie Whitelaw, introduced Special Category Status for prisoners. Prior to this decision, all republican and loyalist prisoners had been held at Crumlin Road Prison, where numbers had trebled since 1969 (the start of the Troubles). When, in 1972, republican and loyalist prisoners at Crumlin Road embarked on a hunger strike, demanding to be treated as political prisoners, their demands were met by Willie Whitelaw.

This meant that those prisoners charged with offences relating to the Troubles were treated as prisoners of war (POWs), did not have to engage in prison work, could wear their own clothes and could interact with the prison authorities through a Commanding Officer (OC). In practice, they were allowed to run their own prisoner-of-war compounds within Long Kesh,[381] segregated as to membership of paramilitary group (e.g. IRA, INLA, UDA, UVF etc). While this decision may have been justified as a way to alleviate a prison capacity problem, its implementation was seen as an unambiguous admission by the British government that the conflict in the North was politically motivated and therefore constituted a war.

However in 1976, under the Labour government headed by James Callaghan, the Special Category Status for prisoners was phased out and abolished by the new NI Secretary of State, Merlyn Rees. From that point on, there would be two types of republican prisoners: political prisoners already serving out their sentences in the cages of Long Kesh, with all the benefits of prisoner of war status; and 'ordinary criminals', serving their sentences in the newly-built, single-cell prison blocks, the 'H-Blocks' of Long Kesh, now officially renamed The Maze Prison.[382]

In September 1976, Kieran Nugent, the first republican prisoner to be sent to the H Blocks, refused to wear prison-issue clothing and so began the blanket protest, with Nugent wearing only a blanket, and otherwise naked. Communication with him was difficult and he was faced with having to share his prison environment with loyalist prisoners, in line with the government's insistence that there were no longer any political prisoners, loyalist or republican, there were just criminals. This position was plainly at odds with the reality that the prisoners had been tried in non-jury Diplock Courts, reserved exclusively for prisoners charged with 'scheduled offences', such as murder, arson and others relating to explosives, firearms, riots and subversion.

When word of Kieran Nugent's situation, and that of more blanketmen joining him,[383] finally reached the outside, the remand prisoners in other prisons decided to launch a

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[381] The camps were also referred to as 'cages', as they were surrounded by barbed wire security fences.

[382] The H-Blocks were single-storey, single cell complexes in the shape of the letter 'H', with flat roofs and barred windows. There were 6 H-Blocks, each consisting of four wings (A,B,C and D) with an administration area in the centre. Each H-Block contained 100 cells, measuring 8 foot by 10 foot. All of the blocks were heavily secured with surrounding fences and barbed wire, with a fifteen-foot outer wall and sentry boxes, and an additional razor wire fence surrounding the perimeter of the whole camp.

[383] Four months later, over forty republican prisoners were refusing to wear the prison uniform.

campaign of protest themselves. When appearing in Court at remand hearings, they stripped to their underwear, to highlight what was happening in the new H-Blocks, often being on the receiving end of violence from police and prison guards for their trouble.

When they escalated the protest, and appeared naked in Court, violence between republican and loyalist prisoners erupted. The Northern Ireland Office gave orders that they were to be allowed to fight things out among themselves. All of the prisoners, loyalist and republican, acknowledged that the latest NI Secretary, Labour's Roy Mason, was responsible for this new outburst of violence in the H-Blocks.

Roy Mason was a hard-liner who, as Defence Secretary, had introduced the SAS (Special Air Services) of the British Army into South Armagh (so called 'bandit country') and authorised more SAS covert operations throughout Northern Ireland. Mason's aggressive approach was not welcomed by nationalist MPs. In a motion of no-confidence in the Labour government, held in March 1979 at Westminster, their votes secured the fall of the Labour government and the election to power of Margaret Thatcher and her Conservative Party.

Bobby Sands

Bobby Sands was just 24 years old when he was sent to the H-Blocks of Long Kesh in September 1977, one year after the blanket protest had begun. He had already spent time in the 'cages' of Long Kesh as a political prisoner, and in solitary confinement in the punishment cells of Crumlin Road prison. Born in Belfast, the eldest of four children to Rosaleen and John Sands, he was brought up in a 'mixed area' for some years. However, following sectarian hostilities, the family had to move. In 1969 he left school, aged 15, and enrolled in Newtownabbey Technical College, from where he was subsequently apprenticed as a coach builder. But once again he had to leave following sectarian harassment and threats of violence. Such experiences convinced him to join the IRA to fight sectarian injustice. When he did so, he was 17 years old.

The following year (1972), he was arrested and charged with possession of four handguns, for which he received a 5-year sentence. He served his time as a political prisoner in the republican compound of Long Kesh. After his release, Sands resumed his activities in the IRA. In September 1975, he and three others were sentenced to 14 years imprisonment for a possession of a firearm offence. All four had refused to recognise the Court and, as a result, forfeited legal representation and a legal defence.

When the case was disposed of, and the prisoners were being led away, they were assaulted by prison guards. Sands, Seamus Finucane and Joe McDonnell fought back in self-defence. When they appeared before the Governor of Crumlin Road prison, they lost six months remission of their original sentence, and for the next twenty-two days were held in solitary confinement. They were also put on a 'number one' starvation diet, three days on, three days off, for nine days. Their own clothes were removed and they were given prison uniforms, which they refused to wear.

Having nothing to wear then but a blanket, and no bedding in their cells between 7.30 am and 8.00 pm, they suffered severe cold and were forced to run around and exercise for long periods, in an unrelenting effort to keep warm. They were allowed no communication or association with other prisoners (except briefly at weekly showers), no visits (except on a Sunday by a priest), no books, no letters and no parcels.

Sands and his comrades spent three weeks in those conditions, before being sent on to the H-Blocks. But four other republican prisoners had been there, under the same incommunicado conditions, for over a year, and Sands was determined to tell the outside world about them.

Having worked out ways of smuggling writing material into the H-Blocks, and sending written communications back out, he wrote an account of the *'Four Forgotten Blanketmen'*, describing the conditions of the punishment routine: the unremitting cold, being forced to keep exercising to keep warm, the lack of bedding during the day, the paucity of food and the solitary confinement, while all the time knowing that this treatment was designed to break their spirit. He wrote, *"Having eaten your dinner you still feel hungry as ever and equally as cold and miserable. You know you could simply end it all by putting on the prison garb and calling for a screw but you don't. You know that this torture is to make you do just that, to break your resistance. You know that you are a POW no matter what they may try to do to you".*[384]

The Blanket Protest

For the next stage of his own incarceration, Bobby Sands was processed as a blanketman, given two blankets, and led, naked, to a cell in H5 block, where he met his new cellmate, INLA volunteer Tony O'Hara. O'Hara was impressed with Sands' energy, organisation skills, education plans and memory. For his part, Sands was unimpressed with the culture of passivity that was sucking the spirit from the prisoners and making life easy for the

[384] D O'Hearn, *Bobby Sands, Nothing But an Unfinished Song* (London, 2016), p. 162.

warders. He argued that the only way to get word of the blanket protest to the outside world, and to achieve political status again, was to organise an effective campaign. He started to create communication channels, which required taking visits from family and friends – and for those visits the prisoners would have to put on the prison uniform. Next, they would have to find ways to create written communications and smuggle them out of the prison. Cigarette papers, even toilet paper was put to use. Ball-point pens and refills were acquired from prison officers and priests. The repression and brutality they were being subjected to must be made known, but in a way that people remembered and related to, e.g. in a story or a poem. Sands wrote, and sent out, his first article on 27 October, 1977, within three weeks of arriving at the H-Blocks.

"He wrote about life in the H-Blocks, both the good and the bad. He told of the depression and comradeship. He wrote surreptitiously, with ball-point pen refill on slick prison toilet paper, one ear cocked for approaching screws who would confiscate his writing and send him to the punishment cells if they caught him. When he finished, he signed his Irish name, Roibeard Ó Seachnasaigh, folded the paper into a tight wad, and took it to his mother on his next visit."[385]

The article was published anonymously in Republican News on 5 November, 1977, the first ever eye-witness account of life on the blanket. Having described the desolation, the cold temperature, the poor diet, the lack of reading material, the ailing and dishevelled physical appearance of his fellow prisoners, their isolation from their families, their lack of exercise and their lack of fresh air, Sands ended with:

"We are all republican Prisoners-Of-War here, and there is nothing that the Prison Authorities, the Northern Ireland Office, or the British government can say or do to change this. They can keep us incarcerated and naked, they may use everything and every means at their disposal to try and break us. We have lived in terrible conditions under constant harassment, through a freezing winter and a sweltering summer locked up in our cells like animals.

"But there is one thing that we remember always and those who torment us would do well to listen: 'You have nothing in your entire arsenal to break one single man who refuses to be broken' ".[386]

Sands also turned his attention to the morale of his fellow prisoners, organising debates, sing-songs, education (especially the learning of the Irish language) and games. At Christmas, they refused to take Christmas dinner in the canteen as this would involve

[385] *Ibid.,* p. 172.
[386] *Ibid.,* p. 173-174, quoting *Republican News* (5 November, 1977), p. 3.

wearing the prison uniform. So, instead they ate it in their cells, following which they had a rousing evening of carol singing, poetry recitation and joke-telling. That day they were given a delivery of hundreds of Christmas cards, something which greatly lifted their spirits.

But on seeing the ways the prisoners were communicating with each other (by shouting through quarter-inch gaps in their cell doors) and thereby keeping up morale, the prison authorities arranged to have these gaps covered and closed by strips of metal. This was yet another severe blow to morale. Communication was now made far more difficult, and the prisoners could no longer see each other being escorted to the toilets. Their only sight of one another was at Sunday Mass.

When a flu epidemic hit Sands and John Nixon, their medical care was brutal. During the day, they were left with only one blanket and the heating was turned off. While they were being stretchered to the prison hospital, with high temperatures, they were deliberately tossed about and dropped onto the ground. In the hospital they had only a towel to wear, while naked and shivering. Then they were taken and bathed, scrubbed and doused with cold water.

Sands wrote more articles about the severe conditions, lack of food, illness, pain and disease being suffered by the blanketmen, including eye problems caused by the incessant bright lights shining on the white walls of their cells. They were refused medical treatment unless they wore the prison uniform. However, Sands' indominable spirit ensured that he continued to fight back. He taught hundreds of prisoners to speak the Irish language, thereby enabling them to shout out conversations with each other that the screws could not understand. He also educated them in Irish history and organised political debates.

However, as a political strategy, the blanket protest was not achieving any desired political effect. In fact, the opposite was the case – more and more republicans were being arrested, tried in the Diplock Courts, given long sentences and sent to the H-Blocks. The blanket protest was becoming stale: the only ones who were suffering were the prisoners. A different approach was needed.

A New Strategy

Around that time, IRA prisoner Brendan Hughes was transferred from the cages (where he had been OC) to the H-Blocks. He now became the OC of the H-Blocks and was placed in a cell next the Sands, his erstwhile comrade, whom he immediately appointed as PRO

(Public Relations Officer). The two became a formidable duo: one thoughtful and serious, with long experience (Hughes), the other young, with lots of ideas and energy (Sands).

Hughes had been an important figure in the IRA structure before his imprisonment. He knew the army numbers were being seriously eroded by the arrest and long-term imprisonment of volunteers. He had been instrumental in reforming the make-up of the organisation from normal military brigade structures to revolutionary cell structures, emphasising secrecy. He also knew that the political side of the movement had to be strengthened and become more involved with community and social issues. The prisoners' issue would now become part of the new strategy.

Prisoners now wore the detested uniform to take visits, thereby raising morale at seeing their loved ones and knowing they were contributing to changes in revolutionary strategy. Smuggling became more successful, in terms of quantity and variety of items obtained. More visits were availed of, by prisoners appealing their sentences and being allowed an extra 15 minutes per day to discuss their appeals with their visitors.

The No Wash/Dirty Protest

Those changes, however, resulted in more violence and intimidation from the warders, with washing and toilet rights drastically reduced. On 29 March 1978, a decision was made by the prisoners to refuse to use the washing and toilet facilities. The 'no wash/dirty protest' began, resulting in ever more repercussions from the screws, such as restricting toilet paper, upending chamber pots in the cells and sending prisoners to the punishment blocks. The cells soon became filthy with urine and excrement.

In Sands' own words,

"My own cell is stinking and my body has a sickening smell about it. We expect more beatings and more harassment because of this stage of the protest. Our strong convictions that we are Irishmen struggling for Ireland, and that Englishmen have no right to treat us like this, will see us through our long protest. All that we ask of the media is coverage of a statement made by 300 Irish political prisoners suffering the worst jail conditions known about in the world".[387]

Morale among the prisoners was kept high by their escalation of the protest each week, forcing the warders into a position of never knowing what to expect, always being in reaction mode and never being in control. When the prisoners continued to throw out

[387] *Ibid.,* p. 187, quoting *H-Block Protest Intensifies, Republican News* (8 April, 1978).

their bodily waste through the window bars, the warders started power-washing the outside walls of the blocks. In warm weather, with the windows open, water inevitably entered the cells, leaving bedding soaked.

Rotting food piled up in the cell corners and maggots started to appear in the piles. Sands reported that he woke up one morning *"and my blankets and mattress were a living mass of white maggots They were in my hair and beard and crawling up my naked body. They were repulsive and, dare I say it, frightening at first".*[388] However, demonstrating once again his remarkable resilience and ability to turn a negative into a positive, he gathered up all the maggots and threw them out of the cell window to feed the birds outside. *"The wagtails came fluttering about in a frenzy, their quick little legs darting them from one maggot to the next, feasting on what to them must have been a delicacy."*[389]

The screws continued to apply pressure by taking furniture from the cells. The prisoners then began to smash all the furniture and put the pieces out through the window. Then the screws took away the beds, leaving the bedding lying on the wet floor. Next they limited parcels and removed all personal items from the cells, leaving only piled up food and human waste. When the prisoners tried to let the urine flow under the cell doors, it was swept back in. Even the solid waste they threw out of the window was thrown back in by the screws. On and on, the tit-for-tat resistance and oppression continued.

In the evenings, the prisoners held sing-songs and 'a book at bedtime', where each prisoner told the story of a book he was familiar with. Sands took on 'Trinity' by Leon Uris, a trilogy on the fight for Irish freedom, which he had read, and had even memorised some of the speeches given by one of the main characters. The words echoed Sands' beliefs and reinforced his commitment to the protests. They are also prophetic:

"If you remember nothing else, remember this. No crime a man commits on behalf of his freedom is as great as the crimes committed by those who deny his freedom . . . Sure, we'll never see the day when we can meet them in open warfare and match them gun for gun, so they'll denounce our tactics as cowardly. But we are not without weapons of our own. Remember that the British have nothing in their entire arsenal or imperial might to counter a single man who refuses to be broken. Irish self-sacrifice and, ultimately Irish martyrdom are our weapons. We must have the ability to endure

[388] B Sands, *One Day in My Life* (Cork, 1983), p. 52.
[389] *Ibid.*

pain to such an extent that they lose the ability to inflict it. This and this alone will break them in the end. Martyrdom".[390]

By that summer (1978) the stench within the cells was unbearable. Hughes sent out an order for the prisoners to smash their windows. The warders retaliated by replacing them with perspex, to which Sands and his cell mate lit a fire, filling the cell with smoke and suffocating the screws who ran in to see what had happened. The perspex was removed. But the soakings by power-hose recommenced.

The prisoners had to resort to covering the walls of their cells with their own excrement as they had nowhere else to put it. But they continued to keep up their morale by organising in-cell entertainment. A report by a fellow prisoner, Mickey Devine[391] of the INLA, regarding one such talent show, sums up the attitude of the prisoners:

"At various times during the acts I looked at our surroundings, here we were in the dirt, urine and maggots, and things we have endured fresh in our minds and indeed which are still happening.

"At face value it seems to be just a simple sing-song, but it really demonstrated to me more than any political article just how determined the men in the H-Blocks are. I personally feel proud to be with the men who have the courage and spirit to laugh and smile no matter what the circumstances and never allow themselves to be grinded down by Britain or her lackeys in black uniform".[392]

"The Triumph of the Human Spirit over Adverse Material Surroundings"

In July 1978, the H-Blocks were visited by Archbishop Ó Fiaich of Armagh, who could see for himself what their conditions were like. He later wrote:

"Having spent the whole of Sunday in the prison, I was shocked at the inhuman conditions prevailing in H-Blocks 3, 4 and 5, where over 300 prisoners were incarcerated. One would hardly allow an animal to remain in such conditions, let alone a human being. The nearest approach to it I have seen was the spectacle of the hundreds of homeless people living in sewer pipes in the slums of Calcutta".

After describing the conditions, he continued:

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[390] L Uris, *Trinity* (London, 1976) pp. 516-517.

[391] Mickey Devine from the Creggan in Derry became OC of the INLA prisoners when Patsy O'Hara joined the later hunger strike and he himself was the last of the ten hunger strikers to die in 1981. In January 1972 he had participated in the civil rights march seeking the end to internment without trial and had been present when the British Army shot dead thirteen people in cold blood (Bloody Sunday). From then on he became politically active. He was one of the founders of the INLA in 1975.

[392] D O'Hearn, *op. cit.,* pp. 199-200.

"I was surprised that the morale of the prisoners was high. From talking to them it is evident that they intend to continue their protest indefinitely and it seems they prefer to face death rather than submit to being classed as criminals. Anyone with the least knowledge of Irish history knows how deeply rooted this attitude is in our country's past. In isolation and perpetual boredom they maintain their sanity by studying Irish. It was an indication of the triumph of the human spirit over adverse material surroundings to notice Irish words, phrases and songs being shouted from cell to cell and then written on each cell wall with the remnants of toothpaste tubes".[393]

Finally, someone who was very well regarded in mainstream Irish society had spoken out. Respected media gave the Archbishop's words coverage and credibility. The authorities decided to steam-clean the blocks, one at a time, and transfer prisoners to an empty block while they did so. Clean cells became available every two weeks. But the shifts provided the screws with more opportunities to violate the prisoners, physically and psychologically, with brutal intimate body searches. Warders found contraband they had not been aware of. *"Thus, wing shifts and table searches were accompanied by cell searches which often ended up with the contents of the chamber pots thrown all over the prisoners' bedding."*[394]

Ever more body searches and more beatings took place, for refusal to cooperate. Nevertheless, prisoners' morale continued to remain high. In December, the screws upped the antagonism by introducing forced shaves, body scrubs and haircuts, using shears, which were in the main defiantly resisted. But more concerts took place and morale was higher than ever. However, when the screws started to block out the cell windows, denying the prisoners sight of the outside world, that was a turning point in the conflict for Sands. He wrote:

"A few words I once read came echoing back to me today – 'No one can take away from a person his or her ability to contemplate. Throw them into prison, give them hard labour, unimaginative work to do, but you can never take from them the ability to find the poetry and music in life' – and I realised that they, here, my torturers, have long ago started, and still endeavour to block up the window of my mind".[395]

Poetic Influences

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[393] *Ibid.,* p. 203 referencing C Ryder, *Inside The Maze, The Untold Story of the Northern Ireland Prison Service* (London, 2000), pp. 181-182.
[394] *Ibid.,* p. 203, referencing J McQuillan's manuscript of *Nor Meekly Serve My Time*, p. 53.
[395] *Ibid.,* pp. 208-09.

Sands had immersed himself in poetry up to that point, which he read and also composed. His favourite poet was Ethna Carbery.[396] Her poetry resonated with him, inspired him, and reassured him that he was not alone. A few of her poems, dealing with such subjects as death *(The Unfearing)*; the 1798 Rebellion of the United Irishmen *(Rody McCorley)*; Ireland's tragic history *(Mo Chraoibhín Cno)*; and mysticism *(The Wayfarer)*[397] are reproduced below:

The Unfearing

I fear not life, now that your arms are around me,
Now that your heart hath told its tale to mine,
For Love hath rent the web of doubt that bound me,
Where once were miss I see his pure Star shine.

I fear not Death, despite its bitter drinking,
And the sad wrench of parting we must bear,
Since, some time, soul to soul shall leap unshrinking,
Before God's foot-stool, in the glory there.

Rody McCorley

Ho! See the fleet-foot hosts of men
Who speed with faces wan,
From farmsteads and from fisher's cot
Upon the banks of Bann!
They come with vengeance in their eyes -
Too late, too late are they –
For Rody McCorley goes to die
On the Bridge of Toome today.

Oh Ireland, Mother Ireland,
You love them still the best,
The fearless brave who fighting fall

[396] Ethna Carbery (1886–1902) was the pen name used by journalist and poet Anna Johnston from Ballymena, County Antrim. She lectured and, along with Alice Milligan and Maud Gonne, wrote plays and promoted nationalist cultural activities, as well as publishing *The Northern Patriot* and the *Shan Van Vocht*, both of which spearheaded the Irish Cultural Revival of the early twentieth century.
[397] E Carbery, *The Four Winds of Erin,* published by Ethna Carbery's bereaved husband Séamus MacManus, available at *https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/carbery/eirinn/eirinn.html#cno.*

Upon your hapless breast;
But never a one of all your dead
More bravely fell in fray,
Than he who marches to his fate
On the Bridge of Toome today.

The grey coat and its sash of green
Were brave and stainless then;
A banner flashed beneath the sun
Over the marching men –
The coat hath many a rent this noon,
The sash is torn away,
And Rody McCorley goes to die
On the Bridge of Toome today.

Because he loved the Motherland,
Because he loved the Green,
He goes to meet the martyr's fate
With proud and joyous mien,
True to the last, true to the last,
He treads the upward way –
Young Rody McCorley goes to die
On the Bridge of Toome today.

*Mo Chraobhín Cno**

A Sword of Light hath pierced the dark, our eyes have seen the Star,
Oh Éire, leave the ways of sleep now days of promise are:
The rusty spears upon your walls are stirring to and fro,
In dreams they front uplifted shields – Then wake,
Mo Chraoibhín Cno!

The little waves keep whispering where sedges fold you in,
And round you are the barrows of your buried kith and kin;
Oh! famine-wasted, fever-burnt, they faded like the snow
Or set their hearts to meet the steel – for you,
Mo Chraoibhín Cno!

Their names are blest, their caoine sung; our bitter tears are dried;
We bury Sorrow in their graves, Patience we cast aside;
Within the gloom we hear a voice that once was ours to know –
'Tis Freedom – Freedom calling loud; Arise!
Mo Chraoibhín Cno!

*pronounced *Mo Chreeveen No*, "My cluster of nuts", meaning "my brown-haired girl", *i.e.* Ireland.

The Wayfarer

He had no crown upon his head
When first he met me by The Way,
His feet upon the thorns had bled,
His gown was hodden grey:
But in his eyes, stars, moon and sun
Were one.

He came, his empty hands outheld,
I gave to him with glad good-will:
And since my pitying heart rebelled
That he should fare so ill,
I took his gold head to my breast
For rest.

Then lo! his empty hands were piled
With all gifts craved in dreams of mine,
And over me the pilgrim-child
Spilled benefits divine:
Joy, Heart's Desire, and Peace most fair,
Fell there.

For my great pity in his stress
Because that sad and bare he went,
I now am clad with happiness,
And rich in sweet content:

'Twas Love, the King, who crossed my way
Today.

It is plain to see, for those who have eyes to see, that in Ethna Carbery, Ireland's poetic heritage, dating back to the Bardic poets of Gaelic society, remained alive – despite that way of life having been virtually destroyed by the Elizabethan English. As we have seen, that it survived at all is thanks to the likes of Charles O'Conor and Eugene O'Curry, who did so much to reclaim and restore knowledge of Ireland's rich Gaelic culture. It had been passed on through the centuries to Ethna Carbery, and contributed to Ireland's cultural revolution during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it was now being passed on by her, even after her death, to another great Irish visionary, poet and patriot, Bobby Sands.

Sands' own accomplished poetry, which he recited from memory, tells of Ireland's tragic history and the personal sacrifice of those who fought for her freedom, as well as those who fought for freedom down through the centuries in other countries world-wide, as in *The Rhythm of Time*. His prose displays his writing skill and steadfast resolve to see beyond the hardship and confines of his cell, as in *The Lark and the Freedom Fighter*.

The Lark and the Freedom Fighter

"My grandfather once said that the imprisonment of the lark is a crime, and of the greatest cruelty, because the lark is one of the greatest symbols of freedom and happiness.

"He often spoke of the spirit of the lark relating to the story of a man who incarcerated one of his loved friends in a small cage.

"The lark, having suffered the loss of her liberty, no longer sang her little heart out, she no longer had anything to be happy about. The man who had committed the atrocity, as my grandfather called it, demanded that the lark should do as he wished: that was to sing her heart out, to comply with his wishes and change herself to suit his pleasure or benefit.

"The lark refused, and the man became angry and violent. He began to pressurise the lark to sing, but inevitably he received no result. So he took more drastic steps. He covered the cage with a black cloth, depriving the bird of sunlight. He starved it and left it to rot in a dirty cage, but the bird still refused to yield. The man murdered it.

"As my grandfather rightly stated, the lark had spirit - the spirit of freedom and resistance. It longed to be free and died before it would conform to the tyrant who tried to change it with torture and imprisonment. I feel I have something in common with that bird and her torture, imprisonment and final murder. She had a spirit that is not commonly found, even among us so-called superior beings, humans . . .

"I dare not conclude without finishing my grandfather's story. I once asked him whatever happened to the wicked man who imprisoned, tortured and murdered the lark?

" 'Son,' he said, 'one day he caught himself on one of his own traps, and no one would assist him to get free. His own people scorned him and turned their backs on him. He grew weaker and weaker, and finally toppled over to die upon the land which he had marred with such blood. The birds came and extracted their revenge by pecking his eyes out, and the larks sang like they never sang before.'

" 'Grandfather,' I said, 'could that man's name have been John Bull?' "[398]

The Rhythm of Time

There's an inner thing in every man,
Do you know this thing my friend?
It has withstood the blows of a million years,
And will do so to the end.

It was born when time did not exist,
And it grew up out of life,
It cut down evil's strangling vines,
Like a slashing searing knife.

It lit fires when fires were not,
And burnt the mind of man,
Tempering leadened hearts to steel,
From the time that time began.

It wept by the waters of Babylon,
And when all men were a loss,
It screeched in writhing agony,
And it hung bleeding from the Cross.

[398] B Sands, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88. John Bull is, of course, a name by which the Irish call England.

It died in Rome by lion and sword,
And in defiant cruel array,
When the deathly word was 'Spartacus'
Along the Appian Way.

It marched with Wat the Tyler's poor,
And frightened Lord and King,
And it was emblazoned in their deathly stare,
As e'er a living thing.

It smiled in holy innocence,
Before conquistadors of old,
So meek and tame and unaware,
Of the deathly power of gold.

It burst forth through pitiful Paris streets,
And stormed the old Bastille,
And marched upon the serpent's head,
And crushed it 'neath its heel.

It died in blood on Buffalo Plains,
And starved by moons of rain,
Its heart was buried at Wounded Knee,
But it will come to rise again.

It screamed aloud by Kerry lakes,
As it was knelt upon the ground,
And it died in great defiance,
As they coldly shot it down.

It is found in every light of hope,
It knows no bounds or space,
It has risen in red and black and white,
It is there in every race.

It lies in the hearts of heroes dead.
It screams in tyrants' eyes,

It has reached the peaks of mountains high,
It comes searing 'cross the skies.

It lights the dark of this prison cell,
It thunders forth its might,
It is 'the undauntable thought', my friend,
The thought that says 'I'm, right!'[399]

Sands wrote many more poems and accounts of his life on the blanket, recounting the relentless violence, cruelty and punishments of the screws, and the prisoners' determination not to be intimidated into giving up their protest and succumbing to the criminalisation policy of the British government.

The Smash H-Block Campaign

In January 1979, the leaders within the Blocks were all moved into the one area, H6, in an attempt to break the resistance of the other, now leaderless, prisoners. But this strategy backfired, despite an increase in anal mirror searches, and other violence and psychological cruelty against the prisoners, as it gave Sands and Hughes the opportunity to train less experienced men in leadership skills. And all the time they were regaled by Sands' stories of exceptional heroism, of the might of one man against a cruel enemy.

Outside of the prisons, people were becoming active on behalf of the prisoners, by setting up Relatives Action Committees, organising marches and interrupting public meetings, until eventually public awareness was turning in their favour and in support of remedying the prisoners' conditions. Other groups also joined in, such as Trade Unions, students and women's organisations. But the idea of a broad-front campaign was criticised by the Republican Movement, arguing that protesting about prison conditions was not, in itself, supporting the armed struggle. They felt they were supporting their prisoners through Sinn Féin's POW Department and by attacking and killing targeted prison screws. Other than that, they felt that the prisoners would have to rely on their own resources.

However, a conference of more than eight hundred people, which had been held in January 1978, and was sponsored by Bernadette McAliskey (née Devlin), rejected that idea. Their campaign was based on the human rights of the prisoners. It seems that the low

[399] *Ibid.*, pp. 186-188.

priority given to the prisoners by the republican leadership on the outside was being overtaken by a growing number of people concerned with the inhumanity of their prison conditions. These included Frank Maguire, an Independent Member of the Westminster parliament for the Fermanagh/South Tyrone constituency. He and others had failed to secure better treatment for the blanketmen by the Labour government in March 1979, and in retaliation refused to give that party their crucial votes in the Conservative Party's motion of no-confidence in Labour. As a direct outcome, Margaret Thatcher took over as British Prime Minister in May 1979.

European elections in June 1979 provoked a debate within republican circles as to whether they should be seeking election, more to show the support of the people against the H-Blocks and British oppression, than to take seats. Within the Blocks, Sands realised that it would not be possible to keep prisoner morale high for much longer. A small but steady stream of blanketmen were leaving the protest, unable to continue and concerned about lack of support from outside. The topic of a hunger strike began to be discussed. A consensus for starting one was reached and word was sent to Gerry Adams of their decision. But Adams was not in favour. The debate continued within the Blocks. Sands argued that it would take a few brave men to pay the ultimate price, mobilise public support and break Margaret Thatcher. The leadership on the outside repeated that it was not for the prisoners to dictate republican strategy in fighting a war. Sands replied that without the prisoners showing leadership, the war was going nowhere. When Adams himself was arrested and charged with IRA membership, and experienced the Blocks for himself, his opinion started to change. After being released for lack of evidence, he made a deal with the prisoners that if they postponed their hunger strike, he would make sure the leadership would intensify activity and resources to their plight and campaign.

The prisoners agreed to postpone their intended strike. Meanwhile emissaries of the Catholic Church, such as Fr Alex Reid, increased their behind-the-scenes work. Frank Maguire visited the Blocks in July 1979. He spoke with Sands and Hughes in their cell and saw for himself what their conditions were. When he left he spoke to a press conference, accused the prison authorities of trying to break the prisoners' spirit and promised to contact the Red Cross to ask for an official investigation into conditions in the prison. Bobby Sands wrote to the outside leadership, directing them on how to plan and conduct the prisoners' campaign. The over-riding message would be short and simple: 'Smash H-Block'. He gave detailed instructions on how to mobilise support through local

committees, mass action, and mass media, including local, national and international opportunities. The prisoners, too, would play their part.

The National H-Block/Armagh Committee was launched in October 1979 and Sands' vision of a mass campaign began, both on the outside and within the prisons. One important event in Ireland would be the forthcoming visit of the Pope. But before that, the killing of Lord Mountbatten in County Sligo, with some of his family and others, occurred in August 1979, followed by the killing of 18 members of the Parachute Regiment and one civilian near Carlingford Lough. Within days, the leaders in the prison were moved to other blocks, seriously disrupting their organisation of the mass campaign on the outside. They struggled on regardless.

On a visit to Bobby Sands, organised though the campaign, newspaper journalist Joan Boyd described how he looked (a *"grotesque looking figure with filthy shoulder-length hair and a long scraggly beard")* and his demeanour (*"throughout the thirty minute visit [Bobby's] hands shook and his whole body trembled. His eyes darted back and forward at the slightest movement or sound, and his face was deathly pale and sunken"*).[400] But she also reported that his mind was clear, his resolve was unshaken and that he had full confidence in the republican leadership on the outside. He had no sympathy for Mountbatten, who had been part of the British war machine, and a perpetrator of British injustice in other British colonies. He told her of the beatings and the illnesses the prisoners were suffering from. And he said he believed that he was dying but would never accept criminal status.

The Prisoners' Five Demands

By the end of 1979 it was decided to replace the call for 'political status' with one for 'Prisoners' Five Demands'. These were: the right to be exempt from wearing prison clothes; the right to be exempt from prison work; the right to have freedom of association with fellow political prisoners; the right to organise political and educational facilities; the right to one weekly visit, letter and parcel. Behind the scenes Cardinal Ó Fiaich was talking to the British government and, through Fr Alex Reid, Brendan Hughes was being kept up to date. But limited offers from the NI Secretary Humphrey Atkins were dismissed.

By Easter 1980, the hunger strikes were again being discussed. A European Commission on Human Rights case had not found in the prisoners' favour. One final push by Cardinal Ó Fiaich to secure rights over not wearing a prison uniform, in August 1980, ended with

[400] D O'Hearn, *op. cit.,* p. 250.

nothing on offer. He had to admit defeat. The postponed hunger strike would now take place. Brendan Hughes wrote:

"By this stage my main objective was to end this bloody protest. Men were beginning to crack up. It was getting far too much. So from the initial objective of giving the outside an issue to build on, my main objective now was to end the conditions that the men were in. And I believed we had done enough for the political issue on the outside. The objective now was to end the protest".[401]

Brendan Hughes and Bobby Sands talked into the long night about how to organise it. Volunteers were asked for. The other prisoners fell silent. One way or another, they knew things were about to change.

The First Hunger Strike

It was announced that the hunger strike would start on 27 October, 1980, with seven men starting the strike together. It was also decided that, at their own insistence, female prisoners in Armagh prison would join around day 30. In an effort to show solidarity with their fellow comrades, 130 prisoners who had left the dirty protest re-joined it.

Catholic clergy continued to try and persuade Sands that they should postpone the strike and allow them to have another attempt at negotiations with the NI authorities. But by this stage it was well known that the British government had slammed the door in their faces. However, media reports of a last minute attempt on the British side to prevent the strike resulted in a document stating the prisoners could wear their own clothing – but it was amended following outrage from Ulster Unionist leaders that the government was surrendering and giving in to blackmail. The amended text stated that prisoners could wear 'civilian-type clothing', which turned out to mean not their own clothes, but prison-issued clothes. Bishop Daly accused the NI Office of 'bad faith'. The prisoners refused the government's offer of 'civilian-type clothing', equating it to the same thing as prison uniform, and accused the government of engaging in *"a cruel piece of teasing and political brinkmanship in an attempt to defuse the momentum and growing support for the blanketmen".*[402]

On Monday 27 October, 1980, the hunger strike began with seven men (selected from almost 150 volunteers) refusing to eat breakfast and declaring that they were on hunger strike. Bobby Sands became the new OC of the Blocks, with Bik MacFarlane the new PRO. The strikers were: IRA members Brendan Hughes, Tommy McKearney, Raymond

[401] *Ibid.,* p. 272.
[402] *Ibid.,* p. 285.

McCartney, Tom McFeely, Sean McKenna and Leo Green; and INLA member John Nixon. They were joined on 1 December by three female prisoners from Armagh Prison: Mairéad Farrell, Mary Doyle and Mairéad Nugent. On 15 December, 1980, 23 additional republican prisoners joined the strike in the H-Blocks, followed by another seven on the next day.

Secret negotiations between the IRA and the British government took place, resulting in an offer to end the hunger strike. On 18 December, 1980, the strike was called off by Brendan Hughes after 53 days, while awaiting a document from the British which, he had been assured, met many of the prisoners' demands. He did this to save the life of Sean McKenna, who was within hours of death, but in doing so had usurped Bobby Sands' position as OC, the only person with authority to make that decision.[403] The three women on hunger strike in Armagh prison ended their strike the following day.

The British had successfully kept Bobby Sands from communicating with key players. Their offer had not met the prisoners' demands and the civilian-type clothing they supplied was rejected. Sands, after discussing with other trusted prisoners what had gone wrong with their strategy, realised that there was only one possible solution: another hunger strike.

The Second Hunger Strike

After a lot of thought, discussion, soul searching, recrimination and argument, the second hunger strike began with Bobby Sands refusing food on Sunday March 1, 1981. He made the decision despite orders from the IRA Army Council not to go ahead. Sands realised that failure to proceed with a second strike would not only mean the failure of the prisoners' campaign for political status, but would also badly affect the military campaign being waged outside the prison. And he also knew that time was of the essence: he was losing volunteers on the dirt and blanket protest daily, and morale among the prisoners was low. They could not wait for another round of attempts by well-meaning clergy to obtain resolution. The British were more determined than ever not to give in.

Another realisation Sands had, was that he had to lead this hunger strike himself, as he knew that he had the willpower not to be persuaded off it at the last minute. He had also made sure his family would respect his wishes and allow him to die, because he was certain that, this time, there would be fatalities. Any volunteer who joined the strike would have to realise that their death was inevitable. That was the sacrifice they would have to

[403] The British government's tried and trusted strategy of 'divide and rule' was once more in play.

make. They would join the strike one at a time, a week or so apart, and would be in total control of their own decision-making.

Sands' hunger strike commenced with the prisoners issuing the following statement :

"We have asserted that we are political prisoners and everything about our country, our arrests, interrogations, trials and prison conditions, show that we are politically motivated and not motivated by selfish reasons or for selfish ends. As further demonstration of our selflessness and the justness of our cause a number of our comrades, beginning today with Bobby Sands, will hunger strike to the death unless the British government abandons its criminalisation policy and meets our demands for political status".[404]

After him followed IRA volunteers Francis Hughes (joining on 15 March), Raymond McCreesh (joining on 22 March) and INLA volunteer Patsy O'Hara (who also joined on 22 March). Six others would join at later intervals. On the day he started the strike, Sands wrote eloquently about why he was striking, despite the toll on his family, and about his place in the long history of Irish resistance against the oppressive English presence in Ireland. He wrote about the right of the Irish people to take up arms against those oppressive regimes, in the past and today. He acknowledged his admiration for the female volunteers in Armagh prison, and for the other Irish women who had fought for Ireland's freedom. In his final comments, his ability to make a wry joke, displayed his complete lack of bitterness.

Sands continued to write about his time on hunger strike for another 16 days, leaving behind a unique and extraordinary, personally-written archive of his prison and hunger strike experiences. After that, as his condition deteriorated, he was moved to the prison hospital and unable to continue his covert writing. We do not know, from him, what his response was to being elected as Member of the British parliament for Fermanagh/South Tyrone, following the death of Frank Maguire. But it was to Margaret Thatcher's everlasting shame that she allowed him, as not alone a protesting political prisoner but as a member of her own parliament, to starve to death, without conceding an inch.

At the start of his hunger strike diary Sands wrote:

"I am standing on the threshold of another trembling world. May God have mercy on my soul.

[404] R White, *Out of the Ashes: An Oral History of the Provisional Irish Republican Movement* (2017), p. 177.

"My heart is sore because I know that I have broken my poor mother's heart, and my home is struck with unbearable anxiety. But I have considered all the arguments and have considered every means to avoid what has become the unavoidable: it has been forced upon me and my comrades by four-and-a-half years of stark inhumanity.

"I am a political prisoner. I am a political prisoner because I am a casualty of a perennial war that is being fought between the oppressed Irish people and an alien, oppressive, unwanted regime that refuses to withdraw from our land.

"I believe in and stand by the God-given right of the Irish nation to sovereign independence, and the right of any Irishman or woman to assert this right in armed revolution. That is why I am incarcerated, naked and tortured.

"Foremost in my tortured mind is the thought that there can never be peace in Ireland until the foreign, oppressive British presence is removed, leaving all the Irish people as a unit to control their own affairs and determine their own destinies as a sovereign people, free in mind and body, separate and distinct physically, culturally and economically.

"I believe that I am but another of those wretched Irishmen born of a risen generation with a deeply rooted and unquenchable desire for freedom. I am dying not just to attempt to end the barbarity of H-Block, or to gain the rightful recognition of a political prisoner, but primarily what is lost in here is lost for the Republic and those wretched oppressed whom I am deeply proud to know as the 'risen people'. . .

"I wrote some more notes to the girls in Armagh today. There is so much which I would like to say about them, about their courage, determination and unquenchable spirit of resistance. They are to be what Countess Markievicz, Anne Devlin, Mary Ann McCracken, Marie Mac Swiney, Betsy Gray, and those other Irish heroines are to us all. And of course I think of Ann Parker, Laura Crawford, Rosemary Bleakeley, and I'm ashamed to say I cannot remember all their sacred names.

"Mass was solemn, the lads as ever brilliant. I ate the statutory weekly bit of fruit last night. As fate had it, it was an orange and, the final irony, it was bitter. The food is being left at the door. My portions, as expected, are quite larger than usual, or those which my cell mate Malachy is getting".[405]

[405] B Sands, *op. cit.*, pp. 231-232.

Bobby Sands' Death

The news of Bobby Sands' death was relayed by Republican News in this report:

"On 5 May, 1981 IRA Volunteer, Hunger Striker and Fermanagh South/Tyrone MP Bobby Sands died in the H-Block prison hospital at Long Kesh. He had endured 65 days without food, and had spent his last two days in a coma. Sands' emaciated body, lying in state at his home in Belfast's Twinbrook estate, told the story of the torment and suffering which he had endured.

"Sands' condition had deteriorated steadily until he finally fell into a coma the previous Sunday morning from which he never regained consciousness. Lying in another cell in the prison hospital, South Derry Hunger Striker, Francis Hughes was reported to be periodically slipping into unconsciousness also. And there was increasing fear that he too was close to death.

"In the weeks and days before Bobby Sands died there were two major attempts to unconditionally end the Hunger Strike. The first was an intervention by the European Commission on Human Rights. This was supported by the Dublin government and the SDLP as a way to alleviate nationalist pressure on them to take Britain to task by supporting the prisoners demands. The second was the visit to Sands from the Pope's Private Secretary Fr John Magee. Both interventions ended in failure following re-affirmations to their relatives by Bobby Sands, Francis Hughes, Raymond McCreesh and Patsy O'Hara that they would not settle for less than the Five Demands.

"For over a week before his death Bobby Sands had been in a critical condition with death a possibility at any moment. Several times he had reported that he had felt himself slipping into unconsciousness but managed to pull himself back.

"His skin had become so thin that he was placed on a water-bed to prevent his bones breaking through and a week before he died, he was so weak that his conversation with the Pope's envoy, left him totally exhausted.

"By Thursday he had lost all feeling in his mouth and gums and was having great difficulty talking. He was also suffering great pain and medical staff indicated that he was on the point of death.

"Of all the interventions in the Hunger Strike, possibly the most despicable came from British Labour Party opposition spokesperson on the North, Don Concannon who, on Friday, 1 May arrived in Ireland and went to the H-Block prison hospital where he told a dying Bobby Sands that he and his party did not support the hunger strikers' demands.

"Concannon's ghoulish visit – to tell a dying man that he did not support him – caused consternation among elements of the British Labour Party, 28 of whose MPs had signed a parliamentary motion calling on the British government to negotiate with the prisoners.

"By Saturday, Sands had lost his eyesight completely and had no feeling in one side of his face, and then in the early hours of Sunday morning even his powerful determination could no longer keep him conscious and he slipped into a coma.

"From this point on Sands' death could have come at any moment and his family remained constantly at his bedside. His breathing became more laboured as his body struggled to stay alive but finally at 1.17 am on Tuesday, 5 May, Bobby Sands died. However prepared people may have thought they were for Sands' death, the news came as a profound shock to the Irish nation, outraging people north and south. It also caused a huge international reaction.

"On the streets of the six counties crowds gathered and prayed while others built barricades

or fought fierce running battles with the British Army and RUC.

"Thousands of people in the 26 counties reacted immediately to the news with widespread marches and vigils. Dublin's O'Connell Street was brought to a standstill as hundreds gathered in silent vigil throughout the morning.

"The body of Bobby Sands was brought to his Twinbrook home in Belfast on Tuesday evening where a steady stream of thousands of mourners filed past his open coffin which was alternatively flanked by guards of honour from Óglaigh na hÉireann, Na Fianna Éireann and Cumann na mBan.

"On Wednesday Sands' remains, flanked by an IRA Guard of Honour, made the short journey to St Luke's chapel.

"At around 2pm the following day, Thursday, the funeral set out for the four-mile journey to the cemetery. Men, women and youths wept as the cortege passed by. A piper played the tune of the H-Block song the words of which are:

' I'll wear no convict's uniform,
Nor meekly serve my time,
That Britain might call Ireland's fight
Eight hundred years of crime.'

"The funeral stopped close to the Busy Bee shopping centre and Sands' coffin was removed from the hearse and placed on trestles.

"Then, from among the crowd of people emerged three IRA Volunteers who fired three volleys from rifles over the coffin.

"Sinn Féin's Gerry Adams officiated at the graveside ceremony which began with the playing of the Last Post. The Tricolour was removed from the coffin, and along with a beret and gloves was presented to Sands' mother.

"The coffin was finally carried to the grave by the IRA Guard of Honour.

"In poignant scenes Bobby Sands' seven-year-old son Gerald helped to spade the soil that buried his father.

"The funeral oration was delivered by Fermanagh republican Owen Carron, who had been Bobby Sands' election agent. During the course of the oration he said: "They tried to compromise Bobby Sands, they tried to compromise his supporters, but they failed. Around the world Bobby Sands has humiliated the British government. In Bobby Sands' death they have sown the seeds of their own destruction."

"It was later estimated that over 100,000 people attended what was the biggest IRA funeral since that of hunger striker Terence McSwiney in 1920".[406]

Nine More Deaths

Nine other prisoners on hunger strike in the H-Blocks were to follow Bobby Sands to their deaths before the protest ended. They were:

Francis Hughes, Bellaghy, South Derry, IRA, aged 25 years, died May 12, 1981;
Raymond McCreesh, South Armagh, IRA, aged 24 years, died 21 May, 1981;
Patsy O'Hara, Derry, INLA, aged 24 years, died 21 May, 1981;
Joe O'Donnell, Falls, Belfast, IRA, aged 29 years, died 8 July, 1981;
Martin Hurson, Cappagh, County Tyrone, IRA, aged 24 years, died 13 July, 1981;
Kevin Lynch, Park, North Derry, INLA, aged 25 years, died 1 August, 1981;
Kieran Doherty, Andersonstown, Belfast, IRA, aged 25 years, died 2 August, 1981;
Thomas McElwee, Bellaghy, South Derry, IRA, aged 23 years; died 8 August, 1981;
Michael Devine, Creggan, Derry, INLA, aged 27 years, died 20 August, 1981.

Go ndéana Dia trócaire ar a n-anam.

Immediate Aftermath

Demonstrations of support for the prisoners and their demands were held all over the world, with people condemning Britain for its callous policies and lack of compassion.

[406] *An Phoblacht/Republican News* (9 May, 1981).

However, on 3 October, 1981, the hunger strikes of the remaining prisoners were called off, following strong intervention from the Catholic Church, and the determination of the prisoners' relatives to take their loved ones off the strike as soon as they lost consciousness. Three days later, the British government announced that prisoners in the H-Blocks could now wear their own clothes, could associate with prisoners in adjacent wings and their lost remission would be restored. In the months that followed they were allowed to self-segregate along the lines of their political allegiances. Following a prison escape by 38 republican prisoners in September of the following year, prison work was abolished. All but one of the five demands had been achieved.

Changes in Republican Strategy following the Hunger Strike

Several seismic shifts occurred in Irish and British politics as a result of the deaths of the ten hunger strikers. As well as Bobby Sands being elected MP for Fermanagh/South Tyrone on 9 April, 1981, as he lay dying, his election agent Owen Carron, was elected to his vacant seat on the day that Mickey Devine died, 20 August, 1981. In the Republic, Maze hunger striker Kieran Doherty was elected as TD to the Dáil for the Cavan/Monaghan constituency. He died from his hunger strike two months later on 2 August, 1981.

Over the next few years, the political strategy of the Republican Movement gradually changed, with decisions made to contest elections, take seats in Northern Ireland's decision-making bodies, call ceasefires, agree to disarm and play a full part in the Peace Process. In 1998 people on both sides of the Irish Border, north and south, voted in favour of The Good Friday Agreement, which brought a welcome semblance of peace to the beleaguered people of Northern Ireland, brought power sharing in government to all the elected members and parties of the Northern Ireland Assembly and outlined and assured a way forward, by referendum engaged in by all the people of Ireland, for a future United Ireland.

Epilogue

HAVING COME TO the end of this book on England's colonisation of Ireland, and the resistance of Ireland's people to that colonisation, it is appropriate to recap and reflect. In the centuries under consideration, from the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I (1558), up and including the reign of Elizabeth II (2022), we have seen that Ireland was ruthlessly and brutally ruled by England, in one way or another. This book has explored persecution, oppression, violence, wars, conquests, land appropriation, deaths, murders, famine, evictions, expulsions, plantations, imprisonments, torture, executions, false prosecutions, hunger strikes and much more by way of unbearable hardship that the people of Ireland, including our ancestors, had to endure. England was determined to eliminate our people's resistance to its rule in Ireland. It did this by all of the above tactics, as well as by depriving our people of their right to education, to their language, to their religion, to their culture, to their laws and to their history.

Despite the power of England – which, during the period under consideration was the largest and strongest empire in the world – the people of Ireland found ways to resist their enemy and finally, in ways never before done, to bring England to the negotiating table to broker not only peace, but the means whereby a final settlement, the unity and freedom of the entire country, could be achieved. We Irish have been waiting for this for hundreds of years. We can wait a few more years, because we know it will come. The spirit of resistance, and the determination to procure our freedom is, in the Irish people, unquenchable. England did not break our spirit and never will.

We, the people of Ireland, will forever be in debt to the seven heroes depicted in this book, and to the many other unmentioned and forgotten heroes, women as well as men, who willingly, century after century, gave their lives so that Ireland would be free; and so that we, their descendants, would be free. The journey is not over, and will not be over until Ireland is once again a free, united country – a republic. But we are nearly there.

We remember too, and thank, our friends in Europe, the Italians, French and Spanish especially, as well as the Scots, who came to our aid when they could. We thank them for allowing our forebears to set up Irish Colleges during Penal times, so that our education and faith could be preserved. No doubt they were mindful of the Irish monks in previous centuries, who brought the lost learning of Europe back to the people of those lands after the fall of the Roman Empire. Ireland has always had a connection with the people of the European continent, a connection probably stronger now than ever before.

And we are thankful that, across the Atlantic ocean, America provided a safe haven for our exiles, our starving, our landless, our homeless, our sick and our oppressed ancestors. We remember too, as I do personally, that Britain provided a home when times became too tough for our forebears to stay in Ireland – although that generosity often came, as it did for my parents and their generation, when England's actions had rendered Ireland an impossible place in which to live and raise a family, forcing them to employ their skills and hard work to the ultimate benefit of the British State rather than their own. Nevertheless, we made our homes there and we are grateful.

We have now reached a stage in our historical journey where the future of our country and our people will be decided, not by war and oppression, but by referendum, of men and women. That debate is beyond the remit of this book. That is a matter for full information, full discussion and full consideration, followed by a fair and transparent decision rooted in fair voting procedures.

But I would point out that it has been shown that Britain's most recent referendum (on whether to leave the European Union) was not conducted honestly by senior politicians endorsing a Leave vote. And in the last few years we have repeatedly witnessed senior Tory government politicians, including Prime Ministers, acting in ways that showed their complete disregard for the rules of parliamentary procedure, international treaties, human rights and even their own constitutional relationship with their monarch. If it had not been for individual citizens taking legal actions against the British government in their Courts, and winning, Britian could well by now have become a totalitarian State. Those politicians and their supporters have shown themselves to be quite bereft of political integrity and morality.

The problem facing Irish people up to the time of writing, is that these are the people who could decide when and if a referendum on Irish unity will take place. Thankfully, it seems

certain that the Tories will lose the forthcoming General Election in July 2024[407], and that Labour will replace them. But Labour politicians have let down Ireland before. They must not be allowed to do so again.

Despite the changing demographic of the Northern Ireland population, with Sinn Féin now the party with the highest number of voters, as well as the party holding the position of First Minister in the NI Assembly for the first time, the British government seems determined to put obstacles in the way of holding a referendum, e.g. by stating there are no indicators at the present time to suggest a majority would vote in favour of unity. They are also suggesting that 'a majority' should be defined as over 50% of votes in favour.

In government after their victory in the August 2024 general election, the Labour NI Secretary of State for Northern Ireland has confirmed that a referendum on Irish unity is 'not on the horizon' and refuses to state what indicators might change that position. Clearly, the fact that Sinn Féin is now the largest political party in Northern Ireland, the largest political part in Stormont and the largest NI party holding seats in Westminster does not count. What, then, does count? They refuse to say.

We should not be surprised by such tactics, but we must oppose them and demand that they play fairly and honourably.

And I would address our erstwhile enemies within the north of Ireland – those who do not want to live in a united Ireland – in this way. You have had the upper hand for hundreds of years, and that may be hard to give up, but that era is coming to an end, whether you like it or not. However, you have a choice, which is more than most of our people ever had: you have the choice to go back to where your ancestors came from (*viz.* Scotland or England), and to remain proudly and defiantly British, or, you can stay and help us make a bright future for everyone on this island – Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter, whether Irish or British – on the basis of equality, tolerance and friendship. Ireland has changed. We are now a modern, free, liberal, artistic, learned and religiously diverse European republic. A new future is on the horizon. You can choose to be part of it. You have that choice.

[407] That was indeed the result of that election.

Only time will tell whether another armed rebellion against British occupation in Ireland will ever be needed in pursuit of Irish unity, but it is clear that the Good Friday Agreement is only a stepping stone to Irish independence. It can never be a final destination.

Finally, to show that I am not totally prejudiced against the British, I will leave the last words of this book to one of their own, British writer and journalist, Paul Johnson CBE (1928-2023), former editor of the Spectator from 1981 to 2009, and admirer of Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher, who wrote:

"In Ireland over the centuries, we have tried every possible formula: direct rule, indirect rule, genocide, apartheid, puppet parliaments, martial law, civil law, colonisation, land reform, partition. Nothing has worked. The only solution we have not tried is absolute and unconditional withdrawal".

He failed to mention that they have also tried: religious discrimination, Penal Laws, blackmail, land seizures, evictions, enforced displacement, enforced emigration, enforced servitude, false imprisonment, torture, hangings, executions, massacres, assassinations, banishment, theft of natural resources, destruction of laws and legal system, destruction of culture, incitement of civil war and deliberate death by famine.

But he is right – the only solution, for them and us Irish, is absolute and unconditional British withdrawal from all of Ireland. Hugh O'Neill, Charles O'Conor, Betsy Gray, Eugene O'Curry, Pádraig Pearse, Michael Collins and Bobby Sands, whose lives were devoted to, and sacrificed for, such a cause, would settle for nothing less. Nor must we.

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